

RETURN MIGRATION
TO ARMENIA IN 2002-
2008

A STUDY

YEREVAN

ASOGHIK

2008

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PREFACE

This publication is the third in the series of studies conducted by the OSCE Office in Yerevan on the migration-related situation in Armenia.

Results of the labour migration surveys conducted within our Office's freedom of movement/migration management projects in 2005 and 2007, as well as discussions held with interested state and non-governmental agencies after the two studies, showed that a comprehensive study on returnee flows and reintegration issues is required and timely in Armenia.

The OSCE Office in Yerevan contracted the Advanced Social Technologies NGO to conduct the returnee survey covering the period 2002-2008 and to analyse the findings. The Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration actively participated throughout the design and implementation of the project, thus ensuring that the major issues of interest in the area of return migration were addressed. Already having gained good experience in interviewing migrants, the researchers made the study as specific as possible in terms of presenting the dynamics of the return process and provide valuable information to the policy-makers and the public at large.

The survey aims at providing background information to support the reform of Armenia's migration policies and legislation, with the goal of establishing more effective migration management mechanisms in the country. In this context, the study provides a well-grounded picture of the return and reintegration process in Armenia. The study will also help to assess the best possible areas for our Office's interventions and identification of future relevant follow-up activities.

Sven Holdar

Democratization Programme Officer

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Office in Yerevan

Yerevan, December 2008

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Advanced Social Technologies (AST), an independent centre for applied social research, has been contracted by the OSCE Yerevan Office in 2005 and in 2007 to carry out Nationwide Surveys on Labour Migration from Armenia in the period of 2002-2005 and 2005-2007. The findings of these surveys have been published, presented and discussed with various state and non-state stakeholders.

Results and findings of the conducted surveys, as well as discussions held with interested state and non-governmental agencies showed that a comprehensive study on returnee flows and on reintegration issues was required and timely. Quantitative and Qualitative Research on Return Migration to Armenia in 2002-2008 was funded by the OSCE Yerevan Office and implemented by AST in March-August 2008 in response to this need.

The overall objective of the survey was to contribute to the policy-making process in the area of migration and return. To help design policies to facilitate the reintegration of the returnees and use their migration experience for the development of the home country, definite answers had to be found to a number of questions, such as:

- a) What have been the scales of return to Armenia in the past six years; are we talking about single cases or significant flows; how do the return rates compare with out-migration rates for the same period of time?
- b) What is the social-demographic profile of the returnees; how does it compare with the social-demographic profile of migrants?
- c) What are the push and pull factors beyond return?
- d) How easily do the returnees reintegrate in Armenia; what have been their main problems in this respect?
- e) How do the returnees evaluate their migration experience; how do they use it back in Armenia?
- f) Is the return permanent or temporary; do the returnees plan to leave Armenia in the near future; why or why not?

Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the Research on Return Migration to Armenia allowed answering these and other questions and

picturing the return flows to Armenia in the period of 2002-2007. We therefore hope that the survey provides valuable information to policy-makers and the public at large.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research combined quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The **quantitative component of the research**, nationwide quantitative household survey, allowed gathering representative data on migration, temporary and permanent return rates broken down by regions of origin and countries of destination, social-demographic profile of migrants and returnees, occupation and incomes of Armenian migrants abroad and in Armenia, as well as re-emigration plans of returnees.

The survey was conducted in March 2008 and included 2,500 households. Considering the total number of households in the Republic of Armenia (778,666 households as per 2001 census), this sample size guarantees a 2.0% margin of error with confidence level of 95%. Geographically stratified random sampling methodology was used to select the households. The survey covered Yerevan, 21 regional cities and 43 rural settlements of Armenia selected randomly with probability proportional to size.

The survey instrument (structured questionnaire) was designed in close consultation with the OSCE Yerevan Office, the ILO and relevant state agencies. The interview was conducted with the head of the household, who provided information about all adult members of the household (ages 16 and above). The final database contained information on 8,561 people. Hence, the achieved sample size allowed extrapolating the survey data on *de jure* population of Armenia of ages 16 and above (2,367,105 as per 2001 census) with a margin of error of 1.1%.

The **qualitative component of the research**, which included in-depth interviews with temporary and permanent returnees, allowed exploring the opinions and attitudes of the returnees in relation to various aspects of the process, revealing their motivation, concerns and any problems faced while coming back and/or during reintegration, as well as assessing their migration experience. A specific attention was placed on contribution of the returnees to the development of the home country in terms of investments, job creation, skills and technology transfer.

In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 106 returnees, representing three different groups: a) people, who left Armenia with a purpose to establish permanent residency abroad but for some reasons have returned to Armenia in the period of 2002-2007; b) labour migrants, who have been leaving Armenia to work abroad for 3 and

more consecutive years, but decided to discontinue their migration experience in the period of 2002-2007; and c) student migrants, who have returned to Armenia in the period of 2002-2007. We tried to ensure that the sample covered various age, gender and profession groups, as well as included returnees from different regions of Armenia and having returned from different countries.

KEY DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this survey, “**labour migrants**” were defined as persons who left Armenia with a purpose to find employment abroad, irrespectively whether they found employment or not. A “**permanent migrant**” was defined as a person who has left Armenia with the purpose to establish permanent residency abroad, irrespectively whether he/she has succeeded or not to do so. A “**student migrant**” is a person who has travelled abroad to study (this does not include persons who travelled abroad for a short-term training).

The group of “**returnees**” is defined as temporary or permanent migrants who left Armenia to live, work or study abroad and have returned to Armenia at least once between 2002 and 2007. The term “**permanent returnees**” refers to those returnees who came back to Armenia and were not planning to leave in 2008, while the term “**temporary returnees**” refers to those who had plans to leave again.

CHAPTER ONE: MIGRATION AND RETURN IN FIGURES

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION FLOWS FROM ARMENIA IN 2002-2007

The survey allowed estimating the total number of people involved in external migration processes in the period of 2002-2007 at 230,000 \pm 15,000, or 9.7% \pm 0.6% of the Armenia's de jure population (ages 16 and above).¹ About 38% of these migrants (or approximately 85,000 people) had already left Armenia before 1 January, 2002.²

In the specified period of time (2002-2007), each migrant conducted an average of 2 trips abroad, meaning approximately 460,000 cases of out-migration in the past six years.³

The types of migration flows identified were labour migration, permanent migration, migration of students, and migration for other purposes (most often temporarily residing with relatives). The data acquired through the Returnee Survey 2008 confirmed that in the period between 2002 and 2007 labour migrants dominated the external migration flows from Armenia. In the specified period of time, labour migrants constituted 94% of the migration flow from Armenia, while only 3% left Armenia with a purpose to permanently reside abroad, 2% had an intention to study abroad and 2% left Armenia with other purposes.⁴ In contrast, among those who left Armenia before 2002, the percent of migrants who intended to permanently reside in the destination country amounted to 32%.

This is to say that the situation has significantly changed since the beginning of 90's when, due to the economic and social dislocation, between 800,000 and 1,000,000

¹ Hereinafter, all extrapolations are based on 2001 census figures of de jure population of Armenia. As per census data, de jure population of Armenia (ages 16 and above) totaled 2,367,105.

² Reasonably, the survey could not cover the vast number of families, which left Armenia during early 90's. The estimated 85,000 migrants come from households, where at least one member still stays in Armenia.

³ This includes the estimated 85,000 departures that happened before 1 January 2002.

⁴ Percents are calculated from the total number of trips.

people have permanently emigrated from Armenia and joined the sizeable Armenian Diaspora in Russia, Ukraine, USA and countries of Western and Eastern Europe.

MIGRATION RATES AND DESTINATIONS

In the period of January 2002 – December 2007, approximately 20% of Armenian households were involved in **labour migration**. In the overwhelming majority of cases (more than two-thirds) one member of the family had left to work abroad; the rest of the families had mainly two labour migrants while the number of families with three migrants was statistically insignificant. The actual labour migration rate, i.e. the percentage of population involved in labour migration in 2002-2007, stood at $7.4\% \pm 0.6\%$. The absolute number of labour migrants was between 162,000 and 189,000. Majority of the migrants engaged in labour migration more than once. Since January 2002, each labour migrant conducted on average 2.5 trips abroad.

In 2002 – 2007, approximately 3% of Armenian households had at least one member who had left Armenia with a purpose to establish **permanent residency abroad**. Unlike labour migration, permanent migration usually involved more than one member of the family: 60% of these families had two or more permanent migrants. Permanent migration rate, i.e. the percentage of population who left Armenian with a purpose to permanently reside abroad, was estimated at $1.3\% \pm 0.2\%$ of Armenia's de jure population (ages 16 and above). In absolute numbers, this would mean permanent migration (or intention for such) of 25,000 - 37,000 people.

Student migration involved less than 1% of the Armenian households. While in the majority of cases (60%) only one of the family members has left to study abroad, his or her migration experience often had a multiplier effect – one or more of the family members got engaged in student migration later on. The absolute number of student migrants was estimated at $7,000 \pm 3,000$ people or $0.3\% \pm 0.1\%$ of Armenia's population (ages 16 and above).

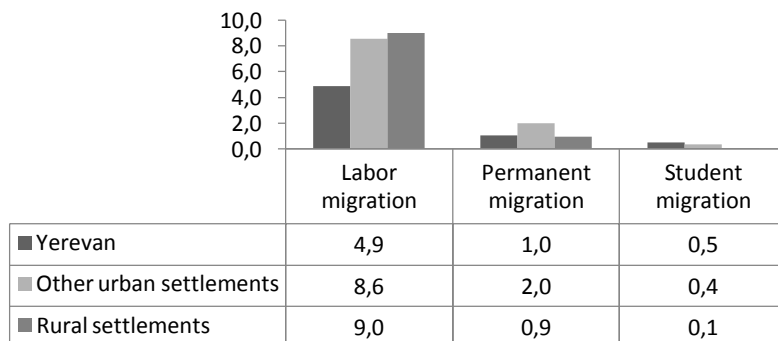
Table 1 on the next page summarizes the migration statistics broken down by main migration flows.

Table 1. Migration statistics

Migration flow	Percent of households involved	Absolute number of households involved	Migration rate	Absolute number of migrants
Labour migration	20.2% ± 1.6%	157,000 ± 12,000	7.4% ± 0.6%	175,000 ± 13,000
Permanent migration	2.8% ± 0.7%	22,000 ± 5,000	1.3 ± 0.2%	31,000 ± 6,000
Student migration	0.8% ± 0.4%	6,000 ± 3,000	0.3 ± 0.1%	7,000 ± 3,000

The compositions of the three main migration flows differ significantly in terms of **place of origin of the migrants**. Labour migration flow was dominated by rural population of Armenia (44%); 23% of the labour migrants were living in Yerevan and one third in other urban areas. Among permanent migrants, 45% were from regional towns, 28% from Yerevan and 27% from the rural areas. Majority of the student migrants were residents of Yerevan (58%) and only 8% represented the rural population. Chart 1 below compares the ratios of labour migrants, permanent migrants and student migrants among the adult population of Yerevan, other towns and villages.

Chart 1. Migration rates by types of settlements



Although the number of respondents in each region of Armenia was not sufficient for high level of precision, some comparisons could still be drawn. Hence, labour migration rates were found to be highest in Shirak, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn, Vayots Dzor and Tavush. Gegharkunik and Tavush have also been most active in permanent migration, while Yerevan and Kotayk contributed most to student migration. Overall,

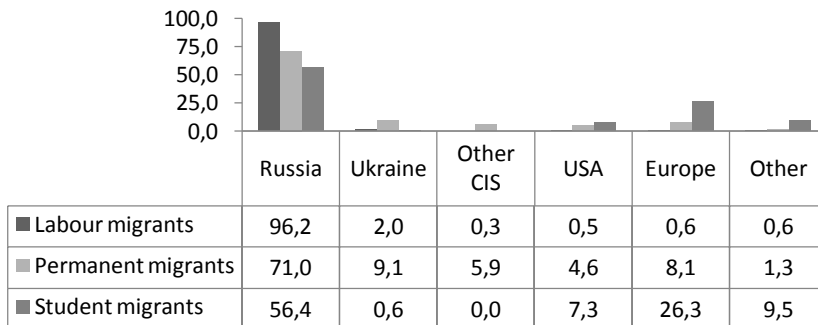
Gegharkunik has been showing the highest migration activity with 15% of population participating in external migration processes in 2002-2007.

Table 2. Migration statistics by regions (as recorded during the survey)

Region	Permanent migration		Labour migration		Student migration		Total	
	Rate (%)	Number of migrants	Rate (%)	Number of migrants	Rate (%)	Number of migrants	Rate (%)	Number of migrants
Yerevan	1,1	8,800	4,9	40,200	0,5	4,000	6,5	53,000
Aragatsotn	0,9	900	11,1	11,300	0,0	0	12,0	12,200
Ararat	1,8	3,700	7,5	15,100	0,1	300	9,5	19,100
Armavir	1,8	3,700	6,1	12,400	0,2	500	8,2	16,600
Gegharkunik	2,7	4,800	11,9	20,900	0,3	500	15,0	26,200
Kotayk	0,4	1,400	6,2	12,400	0,7	1,400	7,6	15,200
Lori	0,7	900	8,1	17,100	0,0	0	8,5	18,000
Shirak	0,8	1,700	13,6	28,300	0,0	0	14,4	30,000
Syunik	1,8	2,000	2,4	2,700	0,3	300	4,4	5,000
Tavush	2,8	2,800	10,0	9,900	0,0	0	12,8	12,700
Vayots Dzor	0,7	300	11,4	4,700	0,0	0	12,1	5,000
Total	1,3	31,000	7,4	175,000	0,3	7,000	9,7	230,000

The survey allowed comparing the **destination countries** of permanent migrants, labour migrants and student migrants. The Russian Federation was the most popular destination for all migrants. Among labour migrants, 96% travelled to Russia. Russia was also clearly the main destination for permanent migrants, 71% of them have settled there. The situation is more mixed with student migration: more than half of student migrants (56%) went to study in Russia, but 26% went to the European Union.

Chart 2. Countries of destination



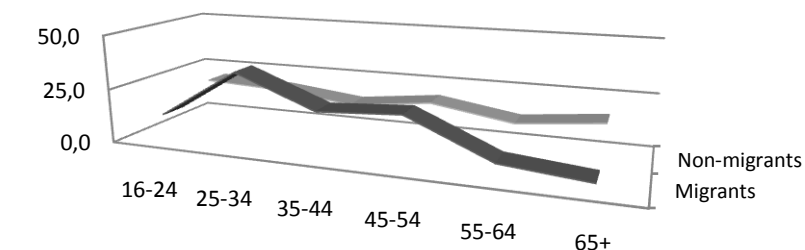
SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE MIGRANTS

When discussing the main social-demographic characteristics of the migrants (such as gender, age, level of education and professional background) it is essential to compare them with the characteristics of the general population. Apart from understanding who the migrants are, this would allow assessing the current and possible effects of migration on the demography of Armenia and the Armenian labour market.

It has long been known that migration from Armenia is male dominated. The survey recorded that 79% of all migrants, 90% of labour migrants and 51% of permanent migrants were men. Women prevail among student migrants; however this flow has been very small to affect the general proportions. According to 2001 census data, men constituted 47% of Armenia's *de jure* population (ages 16 and above). Although our survey confirmed this breakdown for the beginning of 2008, it has also revealed that due to the gender-misbalanced out-migration, the proportion of men in *de facto* population of Armenia has decreased to 42-44%.

On the other hand, high migration activity of middle-age population (ages 25 to 54) affects the age structure of the population in Armenia. Among migrants, the proportion of this age group is 79%, while among the rest of population it is as low as 51%. The mean age is 38 for migrants and 44 for those who were not involved in external migration processes in 2002-2007.

Chart 3. Age breakdown of migrants and non-migrants

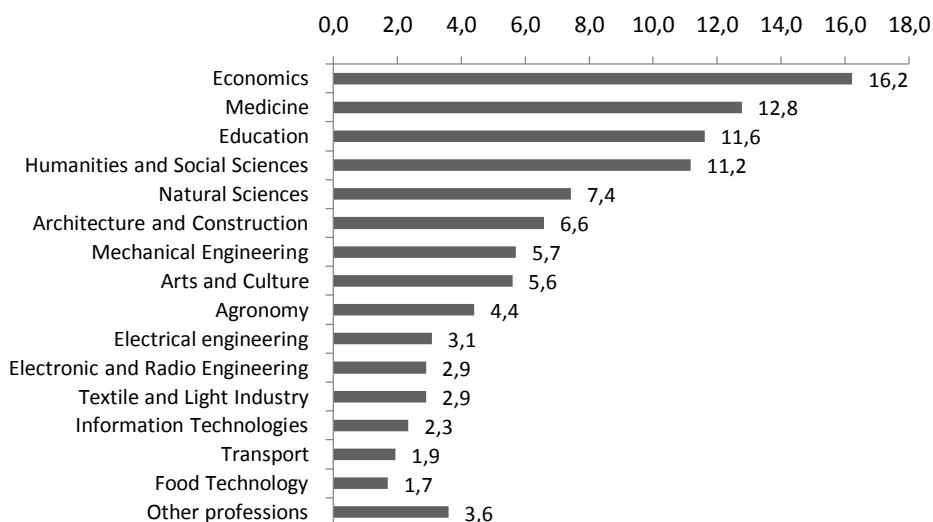


	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
■ Migrants	12,1	35,0	20,7	22,9	6,4	2,9
■ Non-migrants	20,2	18,4	14,2	18,4	12,4	16,4

As far as the level of education is concerned, external migration processes involved 11% of people with secondary education, 10% of those with vocational education and 9% of those with tertiary education.

The total number of Armenia’s adult population with vocational and higher education was estimated at 900,000 ± 25,000. Chart 4 below illustrates the breakdown of the skilled labour by broad professional groups.

Chart 4. Professional breakdown of the population (ages 16 and above)



The survey reported that, overall, in the period of 2002-2007, about 10% of the skilled labour or 90,000 people have left Armenia for better opportunities abroad. Table 3 below summarizes the data on migration activity of the main professional groups.

Table 3. Migration activity of the main professional groups (as recorded)

Professional group	Estimated absolute number	Unemployment rate in Armenia	Migration rate	Estimated absolute number of migrants
Economics	146,000	30%	7,5	11,000
Medicine	115,000	32%	5,5	6,000
Education	104,000	25%	6,5	7,000
Humanities and Social Sciences	101,000	28%	9,1	9,000

Professional group	Estimated absolute number	Unemployment rate in Armenia	Migration rate	Estimated absolute number of migrants
Natural Sciences	67,000	21%	7,8	5,000
Architecture and Construction	59,000	24%	18,5	11,000
Mechanical Engineering	51,000	24%	13,7	7,000
Arts and Culture	50,000	31%	10,9	5,000
Agronomy	40,000	25%	10,5	4,000
Electrical engineering	28,000	21%	12,3	3,000
Electronic and Radio Engineering	26,000	33%	12,0	3,000
Textile and Light Industry	26,000	40%	6,0	2,000
Information Technologies	21,000	20%	6,2	1,000
Transport	17,000	19%	14,9	3,000
Food Technology	15,000	42%	5,1	Less than 1,000

An important conclusion that can be drawn from this data is that migration activity does not depend solely on the competitiveness of certain professional groups in the domestic labour market.

Hence, as in case of specialists of Architecture and Construction, Engineering and Transport, the high migration activity is conditioned by the specifics of demand for highly skilled labour in the destination countries and mainly in Russia. Although the demand for most of these specialists has recently increased in the Armenian labour market, better employment conditions abroad (most importantly higher level of wages) encourage their decision to migrate.

The signals from the foreign labour markets seem to have less effect on the Armenian IT specialists. One of the reasons for low migration activity of IT specialists is that there is a competitive local demand for highly qualified specialists in the IT sector. Another reason, why IT specialists choose to stay in Armenia, is that unlike other sectors such as construction and care services, IT services are not localized, i.e. they can be outsourced, and many Armenian IT companies work for foreign clients.

The moderate migration activity of economists, doctors, teachers and specialists of Humanities and Social Sciences (predominantly lawyers) has a different explanation. These four groups alone represent 52% of the Armenian skilled labour and the

Armenian labour market clearly cannot absorb all the labour available, which is reflected in high unemployment rates of these professionals in Armenia. Nevertheless, the labour markets of key destination countries are equally not ready to take many of them in. Hence, one of the options that some of these specialists choose is to take less skilled jobs available in the foreign markets.

Low migration activity of food technologists and specialists of Textile and Light Industries, on the other hand, is mostly conditioned by the gender breakdown of these professional groups. Overwhelming majority of these specialists are women. Although over 40% of them are unemployed in Armenia, there are very limited opportunities for them to find employment abroad.⁵

Interviews with key employers of Armenia, conducted in April 2008 in frames of the ILO commissioned study “Armenia: Migration and Development” suggested that so far, with the exception of the construction sector, it does not seem that the absence of skilled workers in Armenia leads to lower quality and/or quantity of output. However, the situation may change over time, and the findings of the survey should alert the policy-makers on possible negative effects of skilled labour emigration.

OCCUPATION AND INCOME IN THE DESTINATION COUNTRIES

As mentioned earlier in this report, the results of the survey suggest that in the period of 2002-2007 there have been approximately 460,000 cases of out-migration from Armenia. In 90% of these cases, the migrants found employment abroad. The employment rate was highest among labour migrants: only 4% of them failed to find jobs in the destination country. Although finding employment was not the main reason for migration of the permanent migrants, majority of them (60%) also succeeded to get employed. The employment rate has been very low among student migrants (28%), which is quite reasonable, considering the difficulty to combine work and study or to extend the duration of stay in the host country upon graduation.⁶

In the overwhelming majority of cases (80%) the migrants took over jobs of skilled or unskilled blue collars (57% and 24% accordingly). Furthermore, in 70% of cases, the migrants worked in construction industry; in much fewer cases the migrants were

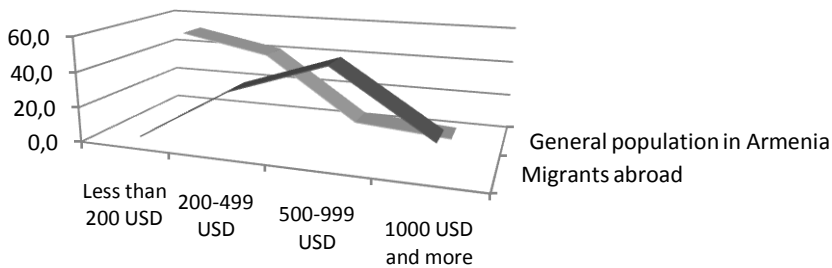
⁵ For more analysis on emigration of skilled labour, please refer to ILO commissioned study “Armenia: Migration and Development”, pp. 19-46

⁶ For more analysis on student migration, please refer to Chapter Two: Migration and Return beyond Figures.

involved in trade (10%), transport (6%), and manufacturing (5%) or provided private services, such as taking care of children or elderly (4%). This is to say that majority of the skilled migrants, with the exception of engineers, construction and transport specialists, failed to find jobs that suited their professional background. This narrows the spectrum of knowledge, skills and technologies that could possibly be transferred to Armenia and could hence limit the development potential of migration. Nevertheless, it is recognized that most of the migrants were ready to take any jobs available to support their families and the significance of their contribution to poverty reduction in Armenia should not be underestimated.

As far as the remuneration of Armenian migrant workers is concerned, between 2002 and 2007 the employed migrants earned an average of 660 USD a month. In contrast, according to the results of the survey, in the beginning of 2008 the employed population in Armenia earned a monthly income of 66,000 AMD or approximately 220 USD. Although in both cases the level of incomes was most probably underreported, this data can still be used for comparative purposes.

Chart 5. Average monthly incomes of migrants abroad and general population in Armenia

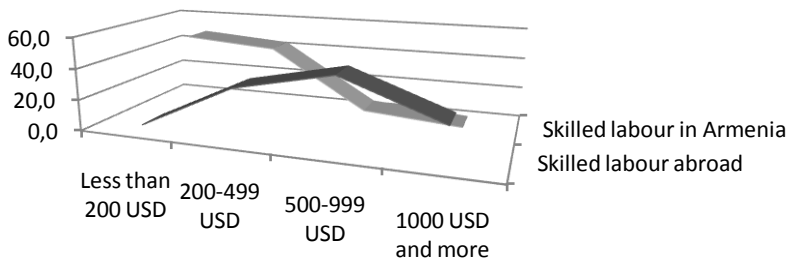


	Less than 200 USD	200-499 USD	500-999 USD	1000 USD and more
■ Migrants abroad	1,1	32,3	50,6	16,1
■ General population in Armenia	52,0	41,7	5,2	1,1

Further, the survey reported that the average monthly income of skilled Armenian labour abroad is 737 USD, or almost 20% higher than that of the unskilled labour (620 USD). The survey data suggests that the difference between the wage levels of skilled and unskilled labour in Armenia is somewhat more significant. People with vocational or tertiary education earn almost 25% more than those with no professional education

(71,000 AMD or approximately 237 USD, and 57,000 AMD or about 190 USD respectively).

Chart 6. Average monthly income of skilled labour abroad and in Armenia



	Less than 200 USD	200-499 USD	500-999 USD	1000 USD and more
■ Skilled labour abroad	1,5	31,6	44,9	22,0
■ Skilled labour in Armenia	48,3	43,8	6,3	1,5

As mentioned earlier in this report, majority of the migrants have conducted more than one trip abroad in the period of 2002-2007. The survey allowed establishing that the wage level of the migrants has been increasing with each consecutive trip. Hence, during their first and second trips, the migrants earned an average of 613 USD a month. Third and fourth trips ensured an average monthly income of 723 USD. Those who conducted five or more trips have earned, on average, 828 USD during their last trip. The latter may be partly conditioned by the depreciation of the US currency in the past several years; however, there may be other reasons as well, such as improved level of skills and bigger salary requirements of the migrants, and/or their increased workload abroad aimed at increasing the volume of remittances sent home.

TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT RETURN RATES

The survey confirmed that in the period of 2002-2007 the overwhelming majority of the migrants (81%) have returned to Armenia at least once. This result was quite expected, considering the specifics of migration flows from Armenia over the last six years. As mentioned, only a small number of the migrants who left Armenia in the specified period of time had intentions to permanently reside abroad. The survey suggests that the return rate has been somewhat lower among those who left Armenia

before 2002: 64% of them have returned to Armenia in 2002-2007. In both cases, however, Armenia predominantly witnessed temporary rather than permanent return. The temporary and permanent return rates and the absolute number of returnees are estimated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Incidences of temporary and permanent return (as recorded)

Group	Have not returned to Armenia		Returned at least once in 2002-2007		Do not plan leaving in 2008	
	Percent	Absolute number	Percent	Absolute number	Percent	Absolute number
Migrants who left Armenia before 2002	36%	32,000	64%	58,000	26%	23,000
Migrants who left Armenia in 2002-2007	19%	26,000	81%	114,000	23%	32,000
Total	25%	58,000	75%	172,000	24%	55,000

In other words, each fourth Armenian migrant can fall into the category of “permanent returnees”, assuming that the incidences of permanent return are counted based on the number of migrants who do not plan leaving Armenia at least in 2008. Longer term projections seem irrelevant, since the respondents could not possibly be certain about migration intentions they might have in the more distant future.

The survey confirmed that in the period of 2002-2007 the annual negative net emigration has been insignificant. Table 5 below contains estimates of the absolute number of departures and returns broken down by years. Although by the beginning of 2008 about 91,000 Armenian migrants were abroad, the data allows suggesting that few of these migrants would settle there permanently.⁷

Table 5. Annual turnover of migrants and net migration (as recorded)⁸

Year	Departures	Returns	Net migration
Before 2002	85,000	N/A	N/A
2002	40,000	37,000	(3,000)
2003	49,000	50,000	1,000

⁷ This assumption is based on the general trends in the area of migration and return over the last five or six years. It remains to be seen how the developments of 2008, both in terms of internal political situation in Armenian and in the financial markets globally, would affect the migration processes.

⁸ This data is well in line with the annual passenger turnover statistics published by the Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of Armenia (Source: www.backtoarmenia.com).

Year	Departures	Returns	Net migration
2004	59,000	62,000	3,000
2005	66,000	66,000	0
2006	77,000	70,000	(7,000)
2007	85,000	85,000	0
Total	461,000	370,000	(91,000)

As mentioned above, approximately 172,000 Armenian migrants have returned to Armenia at least once in 2002-2007. The survey allowed estimating the return rates to different regions of Armenia (see Table 6 on the next page). According to the survey results, the return rate has been highest in Kotayk (all of the surveyed migrants have returned to Armenia at least once in 2002-2007) and lowest in Lori (about one third of the migrants have not returned to Armenia).

Table 6. Return rates broken down by regions of Armenia (as recorded)

Region	Estimated number of migrants	Estimated number of returnees	Net migration	Return rate
Yerevan	53,000	41,400	(11,600)	78,1%
Aragatsotn	12,200	9,100	(3,100)	74,6%
Ararat	19,100	14,900	(4,200)	78,0%
Armavir	16,600	12,700	(3,900)	76,5%
Gegharkunik	26,200	21,000	(5,200)	80,2%
Kotayk	15,200	15,200	0	100,0%
Lori	18,000	11,900	(6,100)	66,1%
Shirak	30,000	27,900	(2,100)	93,0%
Syunik	5,000	4,100	(900)	82,0%
Tavush	12,700	9,700	(3,000)	76,4%
Vayots Dzor	5,000	4,100	(900)	82,0%

Additionally, the survey allowed assessing the return rates from different destination countries. Quite reasonably the return rates have been highest from Russia (see Table 7 on the next page). On the one hand, this is conditioned by very high temporary migration rates to Russia. On the other hand, the relatively low transportation costs make it easier for the migrants to come and visit their relatives in Armenia.

Table 7. Return rates from main destination countries (as recorded)

Country	Departures	Returns	Net migration	Return rate
Russia	417,000	342,100	(74,900)	82,0%
Ukraine	10,600	8,100	(2,500)	76,4%
Other CIS	5,500	4,000	(1,500)	72,7%
USA	6,800	3,200	(3,600)	47,1%
Europe	14,100	7,700	(6,400)	54,6%
Other	7,000	4,900	(2,100)	70,0%
Total	461,000	370,000	(91,000)	80,4%

This breakdown changes considerably when only permanent return is looked at (see Table 8 below). Although Russia still heads the list of countries in terms of the absolute number of returnees, the percent of returns from Russia with a purpose to permanently reside in Armenia is clearly the lowest among all destination countries.

Table 8. Permanent return rates from main destination countries (as recorded)

Country	Departures	Returns with a purpose to permanently reside in Armenia	Permanent return rate
Russia	417,000	46,800	11,2%
Ukraine	10,600	1,900	18,2%
Other CIS	5,500	1,400	26,0%
USA	6,800	1,400	20,2%
Europe	14,100	1,900	13,7%
Other	7,000	1,500	22,0%
Total	461,000	55,000	12,0%

The survey allowed establishing that migrants who left Armenia in the period of 2002-2007 and returned to Armenia at least once before the end of 2007 have been spending, on average, 10 months abroad. At that, the period of their stay abroad was shortened with each consecutive trip. The mean duration of the first trip was estimated at 13 months, second trips had an average duration of 9 months, while the mean duration of the third and all consecutive trips was 8 months. A remarkable finding was that returnees who left Armenia before 2002 returned to the country for the first time in 2002-2007 after having spent an average of 59 months abroad. Another important finding was that the permanent returnees (those who returned to Armenia in 2002-2007 and were not planning to leave at least in 2008) have already spent an average of 31 months in Armenia by the time of the survey (March 2008). This would mean that

most of them indeed discontinued their migration experience, and that their statement about not having plans to re-emigrate in 2008 was most probably well thought of rather than influenced by momentary sentiments.

SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RETURNEES

Apart from picturing the dynamics of return to Armenia, we also wanted to understand who the temporary and permanent returnees are and how they compare with the permanent migrants. Tables 9 and 10 compare the social-demographic profiles of the permanent migrants, temporary and permanent returnees.

Table 9. Social-demographic profiles of the migrants and returnees

Group	Gender		Mean age	Place of residence in Armenia		
	Men	Women		Yerevan	Other urban settlements	Rural settlements
Permanent migrants	72%	28%	35	31%	30%	39%
Temporary returnees	85%	15%	38	19%	37%	44%
Permanent returnees	72%	28%	41	34%	36%	30%
All migrants	79%	21%	38	26%	35%	39%

The data leads to several important conclusions. Firstly, it can be noted that although the gender breakdown of permanent emigrants and permanent returnees is the same, those migrants that chose to permanently reside abroad are younger than those who decided to return to Armenia. This suggests that most of the migrants make the decision to permanently emigrate at an earlier age, while the decision to return to Armenia is usually made at a later stage, possibly after several years of temporary labour migration.

The fact that Yerevan hosts twice as less temporary returnees than other regions of Armenia can be explained by the labour migration activity which is much lower in Yerevan than in smaller towns and villages, as discussed earlier in this report.

Further, the survey brought up an interesting finding that the percentage of persons with professional education is almost equal in the groups of permanent migrants, temporary and permanent returnees (see Table 10 on the next page). This is to say that the level of education does not seem to influence the migrants' decisions to return, and

also that there is no explicit tendency for people with higher levels of education to permanently emigrate from Armenia. In fact, as we have demonstrated earlier in this report, highly skilled labour (persons with tertiary education in particular) shows lower migration activity, which is mostly conditioned by bigger access of skilled labour to the domestic labour market.

Table 10. Social-demographic profiles of the migrants and returnees (continued)

Group	Percent having professional education	Main professional groups
Permanent migrants	40%	Economics (13%) Architecture and Construction (12%) Education (12%) Medicine (12%) Arts and Culture (9%) Natural Sciences (7%)
Temporary returnees	39%	Economics (17%) Architecture and Construction (15%) Humanities and Social Sciences (10%) Natural Sciences (7%)
Permanent returnees	40%	Humanities and Social Sciences (18%) Architecture and Construction (11%) Education (11%) Mechanical Engineering (11%) Medicine (9%)
All migrants	39%	Economics (13%) Architecture and Construction (13%) Humanities and Social Sciences (11%) Mechanical Engineering (9%) Education (8%) Medicine (8%)

Although the level of education was found to have no effect on migration and return patterns, a remarkable finding was that the professional breakdown of permanent migrants, temporary and permanent returnees differed significantly. While economists of various profiles had the biggest shares in the groups of permanent migrants and temporary returnees, very few of them considered the opportunity to return to Armenia permanently. In contrast, the health and education specialists were quite active in permanent migration and permanent return, but showed very low temporary return rates. These findings can be explained by the specifics of supply and demand of labour force in Armenia and abroad, as well as migration patterns of various professional groups.

OCCUPATION AND INCOME OF THE RETURNEES IN ARMENIA

This section of the report is based on the responses of 201 permanent and 212 temporary returnees who were in Armenia at the time of the survey. The data on employment of the returnees in Armenia suggests that about 60% of permanent returnees and 32% of temporary returnees were employed in Armenia in the beginning of 2008. Among the rest of the population, i.e. among those who did not participate in external migration processes, the employment rate stood at 43%. Table 11 below compares the economic activity and employment of permanent and temporary returnees, and non-migrants.

Note: Labour resources are defined as able-bodied working age population. The Labour Code of Armenia defines working age as 16-62. Labour resources are comprised of economically active and inactive population. Economically active population includes the employed and unemployed, whereas economically inactive people are those who do not work and are not looking for jobs. The employment rate is calculated from the total labour resources, while the unemployment rate stands for the ratio of unemployed to the economically active population.

Table 11. Economic activity and employment (age group 16-62)

Economic activity	Permanent returnees	Temporary returnees	Non-migrants
Economically active population (% of Labour Resources)	80.4	69.0	62.9
Employment Rate (% of Labour Resources)	59.8	31.5	42.9
Unemployment Rate (% of Economically Active population)	25.7	54.3	31.8
Economically inactive population (% of Labour Resources)	19.6	31.0	37.1

This data allows drawing several important conclusions. First, the economic activity and employment rate being highest among permanent returnees suggests that most of them try and manage to find employment back in Armenia. This could further strengthen their motivation to stay in Armenia rather than re-emigrate.

Second, the relatively high economic activity of temporary returnees suggests that most of them are actually looking for employment opportunities in Armenia. So far, the majority of them have failed to do so. However, we think it safe to assume that finding

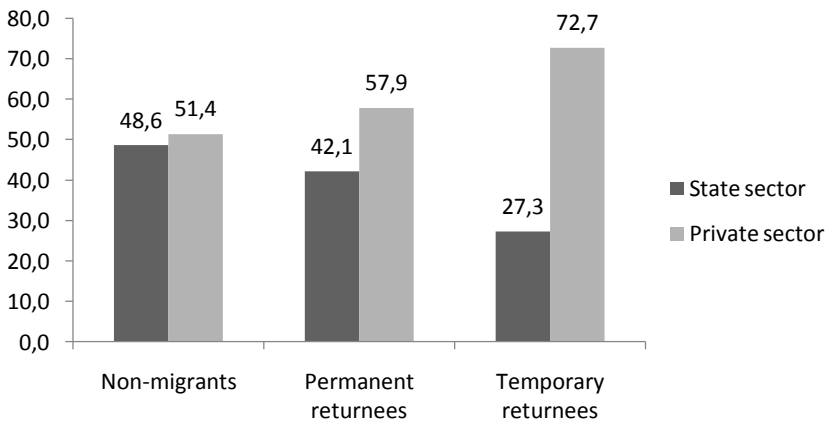
jobs in Armenia could strongly encourage the decision of the temporary returnees to discontinue their migration experience and settle down in Armenia.

Third, the difference between the employment rates of permanent returnees and non-migrants may lead to a conclusion that migration experience increases the chances of job seekers in the Armenian labour market. This assumption is consistent with other findings of the survey, namely with the statements supported by the majority of permanent returnees that migration experience helped to improve their on-the-job skills, develop soft skills and hence increased their competitiveness in the Armenian labour market.

Further, the survey established that the wage level of returnees is somewhat higher than the wage level of the general population. The mean monthly income of the temporary and permanent returnees was estimated at 72,500 AMD or about 242 USD, which is approximately 10% higher than that of the non-migrants (66,000 AMD or 220 USD).

The higher level of income of the returnees may be conditioned by higher level of skills. Another possible explanation is that majority of the returnees work for the private sector, where the wages are by and large more competitive than in the state sector.

Chart 7. Sectors of employment



The survey recorded significant differences between the spheres of employment of returnees and the general population. This mainly concerns the level of involvement of returnees and non-migrants in the construction industry. Charts 8-10 on the next page

compare the top-three spheres of employment of non-migrants, permanent and temporary returnees.

As shown, a vast number of returnees found jobs in construction. In contrast, the percentage of non-migrants working in the construction industry was as low as 6.6%. This finding is quite reasonable considering the increased demand for skilled construction workers in the Armenian labour market and the experience acquired by most of the returnees abroad.

Chart 8. Non-migrants

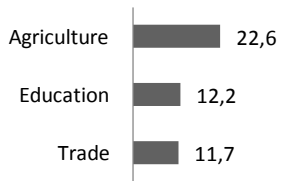


Chart 9. Permanent returnees

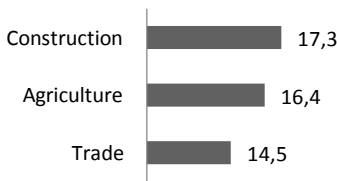
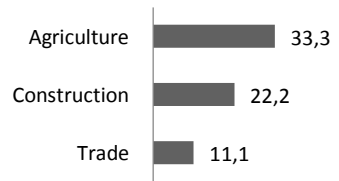


Chart 10. Temporary returnees



CHAPTER TWO: MIGRATION AND RETURN BEYOND FIGURES

This chapter is based on the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with returnees, representing three different groups:

- a) people, who left Armenia with a purpose to establish permanent residency abroad but for some reasons returned to Armenia in the period of 2002-2007;
- b) labour migrants, who have been leaving Armenia to work abroad for 3 and more consecutive years, but decided to discontinue their migration experience in the period of 2002-2007;
- c) student migrants, who have returned to Armenia in the period of 2002-2007.

In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 106 returnees, including 44 migrants who left Armenia with a purpose to permanently reside abroad, 42 former labour migrants, and 20 student migrants. To better understand the reasons behind their decision to return, as well as the reintegration issues, each of the groups is discussed separately below.

PERMANENT MIGRANTS

THE STAY ABROAD

The majority of migrants from Armenia travel to the Russian Federation. Hence, the majority of our respondents were members of families or individuals who have travelled to Russia with the aim of settling permanently and had returned during 2002-2007 to resettle in Armenia.

Below is first an overview of the several scenarios in which migrants travel abroad with the aim of settling permanently.

Often, a family travels **with the aim of reuniting with another member (other members) of the family**. As a rule, the family travels to reunite with the family father who has left Armenia earlier as a labour migrant and has since decided to move the family to the host country, as well, and to settle there.

Another common form of leaving is **travel to a relative who resides abroad**. In these cases, too, one member of the family travels first (normally, the family father). With the help of the relatives residing abroad, he tries to settle—find employment and rent a house. Once he succeeds in doing so, he calls the other members of the family.

For private individuals, there is the scenario of **a local (normally a woman) marrying a person who has settled permanently abroad**.

There are also cases of individuals that travel to visit with family members or relatives and, either on their advice or having found appropriate employment, decide **to stay and settle in the host country, originally not having had such intent**.

Respondents often state that, when they were leaving, they had in mind the prospect of one day returning to the home country. Especially the women who left to reunite with their husbands (who had originally travelled as labour migrants) state that they were expecting to return to Armenia after some time.

“I was thinking we should run away from Armenia. It was impossible to lead a proper life here. I thought we could go somewhere and find employment, settle in a home, live a proper life, and perhaps return to Armenia one day.”

Woman (age 41) from Yerevan

The same holds true for the elderly persons that left to reunite with their children (and the families of the latter). This group of migrants (wives of former labour migrants, and the elderly) has a relatively more difficult time adapting to the new life abroad. They often have to spend time at home, as they do not have either any employment or friends.

“My expectations were not fulfilled. I was thinking I would work, but my husband never permitted me to work. I had to ask for his permission even to go to the shop, just like the other Armenian women who lived there.”

Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

In our interviews, the representatives of this group accounted for the majority of returnees to Armenia. Unable to adapt to life abroad, they have either returned to Armenia or urged their husbands/children to return to Armenia with the whole family.

As most of the migrants travel to Russia, the departure process is rather easily organized. In our survey, there were very few cases of people that had sold their houses and other property prior to migrating. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that people who migrate choose to retain their houses and other property in Armenia. Those who sell perhaps more rarely return. The main concern that migrants

had prior to their departure was purchasing a ticket: this issue was mainly dealt with either using the money earned by the family member that was already residing (and/or employed) abroad, or borrowing money with the promise of earning money abroad and repaying the debt later.

The interviews revealed that very few people had great expectations when settling permanently abroad. Such expectations were relatively more common among migrants to the USA and young people. The respondents' expectations were mainly limited to finding appropriate employment. Many had simply left to reunite with their family members. Their only expectation was to be together with their spouses and children.

“My husband was already working there. I thought we would go, and my family would all be together.” Woman (age 34) from Alaverdi

Nonetheless, not too many of the respondents highly appreciated their migration experience, being happy of life abroad. The level of satisfaction was higher among respondents that had left Armenia in the 1990s. However, one should not rush to conclude that, back in the 1990s, it was easier to settle abroad. Greater appreciation of the migration experience can perhaps be due to the fact that, in the 1990s, people left not so much with the expectation to find a good living abroad, as with the aim of escaping the grave conditions in Armenia. On the other hand, the migrants that left in the 1990s and were dissatisfied with their life abroad probably returned prior to 2002, and are therefore not included among our sample of respondents.

“Our conditions in Armenia were unbearable. But I knew that leaving would be very difficult, too, especially as we went with the family and did not know either the language or the lifestyle. I was thinking, however, that wherever we went would be better than Armenia. And I was right.” Man (age 47) from Yerevan

Speaking of their difficulties abroad, the respondents often mentioned the **problems related with their unlawful residence status** (had to limit movement around town in order not to run into police officers, or give bribes to avoid formal sanctions for the offence).

“We lived in a building that we were constructing, and were frequently harassed by the police at night, as we had no right to live in that building while the construction was underway. The law there required everyone to be registered in their place of residence, but we could not possibly register in an unfinished construction site. The police came, took our passports, and the next

day, we would all chip in money to go and bring our passports back.” Man (age 56) from Yeghegnadzor

The second most common problem that was more frequently encountered by migrants living in Moscow and St. Petersburg was **the unfriendly attitude of the locals and the fear of extreme nationalist groups.**

“For a while, we lived in a communal flat. Whenever the neighbors were Russian, it was very difficult to get along. They do not like us.” Man (age 56) from Yeghegnadzor

Many faced **difficulties finding employment.** For those residing in the Russian Federation, the problem was often due to the fact that they were mainly working in the construction sector, and as construction sector employment was not permanent, they constantly had to look for new jobs in construction.

“Finding work was initially a problem. I was engaged in trade. I tried to find work in my area of specialization, but Russia was not short of sociologists.” Woman (age 37) from Yerevan

“As we did not find suitable employment, we returned to Armenia after a few months. Next year, we left again. My husband’s parents were helping us to settle there, but again, we did not find suitable employment and returned to Armenia.” Woman (age 30) from Yerevan

The migrants who left for non-Russian-speaking countries often **encountered obstacles and difficulties due to not knowing the foreign language.**

As many migrants (especially those newly arriving in the host countries) lived in rented apartments, they often **had to change their place of residence** (due to increases in rent or other reasons), which at times forced them to transfer the children from one school to another. Migrant families often had to rent apartments with poor living conditions, as those were cheaper. Some of the respondents had stayed for quite some time with relatives or friends.

“For a while, I was renting a house that had hot water and heating; however, it consumed a large part of my earnings. Later, as I worked at a different place, we lived in the very building that we were constructing. For some time, we stayed in a communal flat.” Man (age 56) from Yeghegnadzor

Among the difficulties of their stay abroad, respondents also mentioned the **depression and loneliness** they experienced while living in an alien environment, coupled with **the need to be with relatives and nostalgia for the home country.** Some had found it

difficult to adapt to the customs of the host country: for such respondents, those customs were not only alien, but also unacceptable, to the extent that some had become concerned about the way in which their children would be brought up. Some respondents had found it **difficult to adapt to the new climate conditions and had suffered health problems.**

RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Apparently, none of the respondents had returned only because seeing a better outlook for their living or employment in Armenia. Some respondents mentioned nostalgia for the home country as the factor that brought them back to Armenia. However, the respondents' decision to return had normally been conditioned by "push" factors, i.e. difficulties that had arisen abroad or their personal accidental circumstances (death, divorce, health deterioration, and the like). Some of the most common reasons for the respondents' return are discussed below.

Growing intolerance towards foreigners in Russia. Some respondents indicated that they had returned to Armenia, because it was no longer safe in Moscow or St. Petersburg. This factor had especially influenced families with children starting elementary school or a university, which frequently had to be absent from home, or even travel rather long distances, which the respondents did not consider safe.

Unacceptable customs. This, too, largely concerned migrants residing in Russia. Many of them did not accept certain aspects of Russian culture, including the relative freedom of the individual from the family and community opinion, and early-age sex. Some of the Armenians residing in Russia had returned not only because of these circumstances, which they see as incompatible with the traditional Armenian view of the world, but also what they saw as social flaws of Russian society, such as alcoholism and drug addiction, both of which are especially common among young people. Concerned that their children might pick up such bad habits and fall victim to them, some families preferred to return to Armenia.

"There were some problems related to how children could be brought up, such as drug addiction and lifestyles not accordance with the Armenian values. I did not want my children to grow up and become assimilated in such an environment." Man (age 37) from Yerevan.

Rising prices of real estate. Some respondents had decided to return, when they had realized that rising prices were not only eating into their savings, but also diminishing their chances to purchase a home.

Inability of the family to reunite abroad. Sometimes, when a member of the family either cannot or refuses to join the family members residing abroad, the family decides to return. This happens more frequently when the spouses have elderly or ill parents who either find it difficult to travel abroad or refuse to travel, preferring to stay at home.

“I had not seen my father for 13 years. Though he was able to visit me, it was still impossible to move 80% of Armenia’s population to the USA for me to feel happy over there. My return was both easier and more feasible. After all, I did not even have education, and was leading a life without purpose.” Man (age 29) from Yerevan

Difficulties of finding employment. This mainly happened to families that had just left: after a while, unable to settle permanently, they prefer to return in order not to lose their jobs back in Armenia.

Inability of a family member to adapt to life in the host country. This problem was more common among the elderly, women, or children, who, being socially more passive and less in touch with the members of the “new” society, find it difficult to become accustomed to the “new” customs and often become alienated and marginalized. As they cannot find their place in the “new” society, such migrants urge the family to return to the home country.

“My child felt restrained over there, played along in the yard, did not know the language, and was embarrassed and started to cry when the other children spoke Russian.” Woman (age 30) from Aygestan

This often causes the family to split again: one part of the family returns to the home country, while the other remains abroad to earn money to be transferred to the relatives that have returned.

Another reason for return is the **death of a family member**, after which the family, due to psychological factors, decides to return to the home country in order to be closer to relatives and friends. There are cases of families or family members returning to Armenia because of their inability to become accustomed to the climate in the host country or developing **other health problems** (often preferring to use the health care services in Armenia).

“I developed an allergy, as my body could not take the air and water over there. It was also due to stress, because I would sit home alone all day, unable to communicate with anyone. We saw many doctors, and one told me that I would be fine if taken back to my home country, as the reason, in his opinion,

was nostalgia. I could not get used to the climate.” Woman (age 28) from Yerevan

Some of the respondents had returned when Armenia **adopted a new Law on Citizens who Failed to Undergo Compulsory Military Service in Breach of the Established Procedure**, which considerably eased the sanction for evading army service. A few respondents cited **extradition** as the reason for their return.

Organizing the return is normally not difficult. Very few of the returnees have acquired sizeable property during their life abroad. It would have taken such returnees quite some time to sell their property. The majority of the respondents had only had basic household items, which most had just left behind, and very few would have brought those items back to Armenia with them.

Not many of the respondents had had **positive expectations** when returning to Armenia. Even fewer had such expectations met. The reason, as indicated earlier, was that many had apparently returned when life abroad had become too difficult.

“I knew very well that difficult conditions were awaiting me back in Armenia. I knew that I was coming back to live with my parents-in-law in the village, but I decided that my children would not attend the village school. My husband would continue travelling abroad for work, until we managed to buy a house. Now, we have already purchased a two-room apartment in Vanadzor, but it still needs to be renovated. Therefore, my husband continues to migrate for work.” Woman (age 27) from Vanadzor

Some of the returnees that had positive expectations vis-à-vis their return had migrated much earlier and had lost sense of the reality in Armenia.

“I was thinking life and customs in Armenia would have changed, but it was not so. High-paying employment could not be found, while prices had been growing rapidly. In Armenia, it is even more difficult to make a living: the money one earns does not suffice for even the most basic expenses of the household.” Woman (age 29) from Yerevan

Many were simply expecting to be relieved of their difficulties abroad; especially those that could not adapt to life in the foreign country were happy to return to a familiar environment.

“I was not concerned about my expectations; what mattered was for me to be back home, back on my own soil. My only desire at that time was to reach home.” Man (age 38) from Aygestan

Many returnees were expecting to find employment in Armenia and to continue leading the life they had had abroad. They were not expecting either economic progress of the country or any improvement of their living or other conditions.

“I had already made some arrangements. I had several project ideas. I was hoping that I would be engaged in cinema, theatre, and teaching. My expectations were half-fulfilled. The teaching issue was resolved quickly and easily: I now teach at the Theatre Institute of Yerevan. I have produced a short film, which will soon be ready. But, some projects have still not been implemented.” Man (age 49) from Yerevan

According to the survey, the hopes of the few respondents that had expected to find Armenia reformed had not come true.

ASSESSMENT OF THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON RESETTLEMENT IN ARMENIA

Very few of the respondents were families and individuals that had saved up capital during their residence abroad. Many had been able to take care of their daily needs, but few had managed to save.

The migrants that returned with some money to invest in business stated that the money had been raised from the sale of their home or car abroad (there were only two such respondents). The majority of the returnees had owned only household appliances and other household items abroad.

“I do not regret having migrated, though we did not save and could not increase our wealth. We have, however, brought back our kitchenware and other small items.” Woman (age 27) from Vanadzor

“All the money I brought with me had come from the sale of my apartment. I used a part of it to buy a house in Armenia, and invested the rest in business by opening a beauty salon.” Man (age 37) from Yerevan

Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents were generally satisfied with their migration experience in terms of financial security.

The assessment of the migration experience was not the same in respect of acquiring new knowledge and work skills and using them for professional advancement in Armenia. Very few of the respondents had performed work requiring good education and high qualification abroad, which would have contributed to their professional

advancement in Armenia. The majority of the respondents had been engaged in construction, trade, and the provision of non-professional services.

However, some returnees had acquired certain skills and experience while residing and working abroad (professional, language, and interaction skills). Some of them are able to use those skills and experience in Armenia, while others, who work in other spheres, cannot do so.

“I acquired quite good experience as a craftsman, but I do not use it here, as I am not engaged in construction.” Man (age 50) from Arpi

“I gained experience in the organization of production and the provision of construction-related services, but I have not used it in Armenia, because it takes impudence to succeed here.” Man (age 37) from Yerevan

The wage amount mainly guides the job search of many returnees in Armenia. They will normally undertake any work, as long as they believe that the offered wage will suffice to meet the needs of the family. There are also people that change several jobs in a short period of time, trying themselves in different spheres, from transport to trade, production, and construction. Returnees mainly took non-managerial positions, with very few taking up middle and senior management posts.

Clearly, the majority of returning migrants do not have specific job offers in Armenia. They return with the intention to find employment on the spot or some job to make a living. Only one of our respondents had known exactly the job he would be performing at the time of his return.

“In 2005, I had come to Armenia, looked for a job, failed, became tired of Armenia, and left again. Then, in 2007, I called people and they told me that there was a concrete job. Otherwise, I would not have come back again.”

Man (age 47) from Yerevan

Some people, after failing to find appropriate employment following their return with the family, had to leave the family in Armenia and migrate for work abroad.

“I think that my husband will always migrate for work. And I will always stay alone in Armenia; hence, I want to go to him. I want my family to be together.” Woman (age 27) from Vanadzor

The people that returned at an old age and had health problems obviously did not look for a job. They returned to Armenia with the expectation of their children living abroad providing them financial support.

The women normally did not work abroad. As in Armenia, they would be looking after the household and caring for the children. Therefore, they could not have gained much from the migration experience.

The young people that went to school abroad highly appreciate the knowledge acquired there and the possibility to live in a country with a different culture and to interact with people that had a different lifestyle and view of the world. They believe it has positively influenced their perception of the world and their ability to build a relationship with other people.

Among the difficulties connected with resettlement in Armenia, the respondents mainly indicated the challenges of finding suitable employment and setting up a business.

The difficulty of finding employment was due not so much to the absence of jobs as to the lack of employment with suitable terms, which would correspond to one's education, profession, and wage expectations.

“I started looking for a job immediately after my return. I was searching intensively, going to all the beauty salons, asking and inquiring. Once, purely by chance, I went to a place where they had a vacancy. They tested and liked my performance, and I was recruited.” Woman (age 25) from Yerevan

Many people believe that it is difficult for them to find suitable employment, because such employment can be accessed only by those that have acquaintances willing to intervene. On the other hand, some respondents stated that it was not difficult for them to find employment, because they had the right acquaintance at the right time at the right place, which had intervened with a request to have them employed.

“I wanted to work as a teacher, and they had promised me the job in return for a favor. I waited for a long time only to find out that someone else had to be fired before I could be recruited. I refused, and instead, agreed to work as an office secretary with a negligible salary.” Woman (age 23) from Vanadzor

The respondents' main difficulty in setting up and running a business was related to difficulties with the tax authorities and the low level of business ethics and underdeveloped business practices in Armenia. The respondents stated that the relationships were often informal, and the agreements oral, which heightened the transaction risks.

“Several years ago, I created a cab company. Then, I felt I could not do business in the formal tax sector here. I thought it was better to quietly work

for someone else than to be a taxpayer: just headache, no benefit.” Man (age 30) from Yerevan

On the other hand, the government red-tape creates problems along the way. The respondents stated that obtaining a document takes excessive time and effort. They believe consumer insolvency to be another major problem for the development of own business in Armenia.

Among the problems of resettling in Armenia, respondents also mentioned **the language barriers**.

“My children want to go to Russia: they studied and have friends there. They virtually do not know Armenian. It is very difficult for them to communicate with people here; they get bored.” Woman (age 43) from Spitak

Especially those that returned to rural parts of Armenia are complaining about **the lack of any entertainment or pastime activities**.

Some people have **found it difficult to adapt to certain Armenian customs**, such as one’s inability to lead an independent private or family life beyond the sight of others, or the imposition of opinions by relatives and the community.

“When I returned, I had to attend the 10th grade of school. I went to a Russian school, as my Armenian was poor. The majority of the children in the Russian school had lived in Russia. There are many differences between Russia and Armenia. In Russia, there is not so much gossiping or interfering in other people’s lives—something people love to do in Armenia.” Woman (age 18) from Yerevan

Quite a few people consider that there is **too much social injustice in Armenia**, and that laws are applied differently to individuals depending on their social status.

RE-EMIGRATION PROSPECTS

The returnees were not very optimistic about their prospects. They mostly thought about their daily needs and sustaining the family, without any expectation that life would somehow improve.

“I do not see any prospects, but I feel better here than on foreign soil, though my son is still there. I have lived my life and want to rest now; here, I find the peace I need.” Woman (age 61) from Yerevan

“In Armenia, one can barely survive alone. I do not expect any more. Here, you work more and are paid less. I am going to continue working, hoping for a better time to come.” Man (age 38) from Aygestan

The returnees that have good education, some success in their careers, and expectations of professional advancement are more optimistic.

Some people tie their future with their children. They are waiting for the children to grow up. They plan to live with their children wherever the latter succeed in life.

The young people that study associate their prospects with graduation and finding employment. They have no clear idea of what awaits them, but hope to find a good job and stay in Armenia.

Some are waiting for a certain moment (for children to finish school or the like) to re-emigrate.

“If I do not find employment, I shall leave, but definitely to Europe, and not Russia. Russians are ill-inclined and badly treat other peoples.” Woman (age 18) from Yerevan

To sum up, the interviews with returnee family members leaves the impression that they cannot find their place either in the country from which they returned or in Armenia. Many of them wish to leave again (some have a clear intent), but not to Russia (from which the majority has returned), but rather, to the USA or the EU states.

LABOUR MIGRANTS

THE STAY ABROAD

This group of migrants comprises individuals that travelled abroad only to find a job, as they either were unable to find a job in Armenia or had more serious family problems to solve (purchase a house, pay children’s tuition, repay large old debts, and the like). Some migrants had left without the intention to stay long or to find employment abroad: they had simply gone to visit with relatives or friends. However, during this short-term stay, they had received a job offer, which they had accepted.

“I left on my sister’s invitation. When visiting, I unexpectedly met with a young Armenian family that needed a nanny. I accepted the offer, thinking that I would work for a short period and return to Armenia. However, they

turned out to be such good folks that I stayed for five years.” Woman (age 54) from Yerevan

Some migrants had travelled abroad to study, but had concurrently worked in the host country, or had stayed and worked for several years after completing their studies in order not to return “with empty hands.”

As indicated earlier, the Russian Federation remains the most “attractive” destination country for labour migrants. The majority of labour migrants preferred to travel to Russia, primarily because they had friends and relatives in Russia, which offered their support with employment and other matters. Besides, the majority of migrants explained their choice of the destination country by factors such as language skills, the absence of an entry visa requirement, and the relatively small transportation cost. The second most popular destination was the USA, where, too, most migrants had travelled on the invitation of friends and relatives.

The vast majority of migrants had organized their departure and taken care of documentation issues in the host country on their own. Some had to sell property or borrow money to pay for the transportation. Very few of the labour migrants had travelled through an intermediary organization or individual. In such cases, the intermediaries took care of the transportation, documentation, and housing issues. The majority of migrants had lawful documents to live and work in the host country, though many of the migrants to Russia had acquired such documents unlawfully by bribing the respective officials.

The vast majority of labour migrants stated that **their expectations were mainly fulfilled**, because they had known prior to departure what work they would be performing and how much they would be making. The migrants whose **expectations were not met or were only partially met** had mainly left without prior agreement on employment. Many of them had hoped to earn lots of money in the host country in order to buy an apartment in Armenia, which they had been unable to do.

The majority of labour migrants stated not having had **any problems in the host country**, and that their adaptation had been very quick and easy. This can be explained by two main reasons: 1) the majority of migrants had travelled to friends or relatives, which had helped them in the initial period; and 2) quite a few of the migrants had formerly (under the Soviet Union) travelled rather extensively to the host country (Russia, the Ukraine, etc.) and did not find any of the current experience new or unusual.

Some migrants had initially felt uncomfortable because of not knowing the local language and customs, but had quickly learned and adapted. Some had developed serious health problems, unable to adapt to the host country's climate, water, and food. However, regardless of the existence or absence of problems in the host country, all the labour migrants mentioned the distance from relatives, whom they missed very much, as the biggest problem.

Speaking of **difficulties**, the migrants mainly mentioned the process of finding employment and housing. The ones invited by relatives had initially lived with the latter, and later, having found employment, had leased a house (most shared a house with friends from work). The majority of labour migrants that worked in the construction sphere in Russia lived in temporary wagons installed at the construction site or in rooms of the building that they were constructing. Interestingly, these migrants did not mention it as a problem or inconvenience. Rather, they stated with satisfaction that the housing issue had been taken care of by the employer or as a result of an understanding with the latter.

The majority of seasonal migrants stated having had **difficulties of finding employment and housing** only in the first year, as later, they would travel with advance knowledge of the employment and housing conditions. They said the key was to work with reliable people that would not cheat and would pay the sum agreed in advance.

The conditions had been far superior for the migrants that resided in the employer's family, working as a nanny, maid, or the like.

Migrants to Russia stated that, prior to 2003, it had been much easier for them to live and work there, but since, due to the tightening of laws, they had run into problems caused by frequent police checks and bad treatment.

“I felt awfully embarrassed and humiliated in relation to the police officers. My wife felt the same. We did not go anywhere besides work. We virtually did not leave the house.” Man (age 60) from Vanadzor

The migrants living and working in Moscow and St. Petersburg had quite some problems created for them by nationalists or so-called “skinheads.”

“St. Petersburg is a breeding ground for skinheads. We felt constant tension. Basically, it was one of the reasons for our return.” Man (age 43) from Gndevaz

The migrants stated that they simply became accustomed to, rather than solved, the problems connected with housing conditions, food, or the climate. Most of the

employment-related problems were solved through friends and acquaintances. Experience played a key role here: the migrants stated that, over time, they started to understand whom they should work for, and whom not, who would cheat, or how to strike a better deal with the employer.

Experience was also essential in terms of **personal safety**. The respondents stated that, over time, they learned to minimize the likelihood of encounters or clashes with criminals or nationalists.

“One constantly needs to watch out for one’s safety: I would not go out at late hours, and if I met suspicious people, I would try to give them what they wanted, so they would leave me alone. I always kept a few rubles separately, which I would pull out whenever approached and would say “this is all...we share it fifty-fifty”; otherwise, they might have attacked, if they sensed I had money. But, if you are alone, you have got to get used, to be obedient in any event.” Man (age 53) from Gndevaz

As for **documentation problems**, migrants travelling to Russia are well-aware of two options: pay more and obtain legal registration, or pay less by bribing police officers each time. In recent years, migrants have tended to prefer the latter option.

RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Migrants stated numerous reasons and factors motivating their return to the home country. However, they can generally be divided into three groups: **1. Health problems and age; 2. Inefficiency of labour migration; and 3. Nostalgia or desire to raise the children in one’s home country.**

The migrants that reportedly returned to Armenia *because of health problems* were mostly more senior. They said that, at their age, it was difficult constantly to travel, live in indecent conditions, not to eat properly, and to perform heavy physical work. Before stopping their migration process, several of these migrants engaged their children to continue their work.

The majority of returnee migrants said to have returned to Armenia because of their inability to live away from the family any longer. This group of migrants can be divided into two sub-groups: **first**, migrants that, unable or unwilling to move their family to another country, for several years spent a larger part of the year away from relatives; they returned to Armenia, preferring to earn less, but to be with their families. And **second**, younger migrants that travelled abroad with small children: they stated

that under no circumstance would they like their children to grow up in a foreign country (especially Russia) that was not safe for them and had alien customs that they would never accept.

“My children grew up, and it was time for them to go to school, but I did not want them to go to school there. I did not want them to interact with the children there. In Russia, a seven- or eight-year old already uses curse language, smokes, and drinks. I wanted my children to grow up in Armenia, though I was making a good salary.” Man (age 42) from Zovuni

Quite a few migrants returned to Armenia because of **deteriorating living or working conditions abroad**, or due to problems of documentation. As a consequence, they had to spend a large part of their earnings to bribe various officials. Under such circumstances, the money left to them was insufficient to live abroad and to take care of the family residing in Armenia. Almost all of these migrants had travelled to Russia.

A smaller group of migrants stated having returned to Armenia **for love of the home country**. The majority of these migrants said that they never had the intention to settle in foreign countries. They decided to return to the home country, when they already had enough money to set up a small business or purchase a land plot in Armenia, or after they had solve the bigger financial problems of the family, repaid the debts, and the like.

“I was very homesick; psychologically, I was unable to stay. I felt it was not mine. I felt those years of my life were wasted. My heart was in pain every time I left.” Man (age 60) from Vanadzor

Some of the respondents had returned to Armenia due to family circumstances (death of a relative, for instance).

The organization of the return process was not a problem for the majority of labour migrants: even if they had some property abroad, they did not move it to Armenia, but rather, either sold or left it to the relatives or friends who stayed behind. They only brought money to Armenia.

Some migrants required several months to return after the decision had been made: the reason was the lack of money, as their last trip or recent stay had been unsuccessful. Some had purchased the ticket four or five months before the return, as those tickets had cost much less.

Some of the returnees had a slight problem in the airport due to the lack of residence permits or other required documents. In this case, the migrants returning from Russia

paid a small bribe, while returnees from other (EU) countries had to pay a fine. Only one migrant had to surrender to the local migration agency (Japan) in order to return to Armenia.

In terms of their **expectations before returning to Armenia**, labour migrants can be divided into two main groups: 1. Migrants that, while abroad, followed the events in Armenia and were well-aware of what went on, and 2. Migrants that were unaware.

The first group of migrants was better prepared for their return to Armenia, and their expectations of the return were more realistic. Some of them said that, being well-aware of the reality in Armenia, including the local labour market requirements, they were confident that they would find some employment. The self-confidence of these migrants was mostly based on their experience, knowledge, and skills acquired abroad.

“I was expecting to find a good job, because I had acquired many new skills. My expectations were fully met: I realized my salary would not be as high as in the USA, but I wanted to return and work in my professional sphere, applying in my home country the knowledge and skills I had acquired abroad.” Woman (age 25) from Yerevan

Other members of this group said that they returned to the home country without any expectations, simply because of family circumstances, health problems, or no longer being able to live in a foreign country for various reasons. In general, the members of this group were more optimistic and glad finally to be back, as they felt safer and more secure here, though they said it was not easy to resettle, and that finding employment or implementing other pre-planned projects in Armenia had taken some time.

“I returned to lead a quiet life and to develop my farm, and that’s what I did.”
Man (age 69) from Urut

“I really did not have any expectations. I was thinking I would come back and be with my family; I had skills, so I would do something to make a living.”

Man (age 53) from Gndevaz

Representatives of the second group of migrants said that, before returning to Armenia, they had obtained information about the home country from relatives and friends living in Armenia assuring them that much had already changed and one could find employment in Armenia. There were more disillusioned returnees in this group. They said their hopes were not realized, as they either could not find employment, were paid very little, had failed in the small business they had set up, or the like.

“I thought I would have employment in Armenia, as well. That’s what they told me. However, what I earned was so little that I became gravely disappointed: I cannot sustain my family with just 30 or 40 thousand drams.”
Man (age 35) from Arpi

In addition to these two main groups, there are several “lucky” migrants who returned spontaneously: they did not intend to return, but, while visiting Armenia for a short term, had received and accepted a job offer. These lucky ones are currently quite happy with their employment and pay.

ASSESSMENT OF THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON RESETTLEMENT IN ARMENIA

The vast majority of former labour migrants **positively assessed their migration experience**, though almost everyone stated the numerous difficulties and problems faced abroad. The migrants highlighted the experience and skills acquired abroad (especially in the spheres of construction and trade), as well as the experience of living alone and interacting with various people.

The migrants were also satisfied that, over these years, while unable to earn large sums of money, they had managed to attend to at least the minimum needs of their families, which they would have been unable to do, had they stayed in Armenia. Many migrants mentioned their improved foreign language skills, especially those that worked in the USA or the EU states.

The majority of the respondents stated that **the skills acquired during their labour migration** had helped them to find a job in Armenia. However, most of them were migrants that had worked in construction, car repair shops, or retail trade in Russia. Many of them even said that, prior to migrating, they had worked in the same sector in Armenia, but had improved their skills abroad in order to get paid.

“I enriched my experience: there, if you do not do your work properly, you will not be paid. That’s why I tried to become a good master, learning to deliver high quality.” Man (age 52) from Arpi

“I consider my migration experience very positive, because I acquired work experience, improved my knowledge of English, and learned to live on my own, something that the Armenian youth miss. I have become a mature individual.” Woman (age 25) from Yerevan

Speaking of finding employment in Armenia, many migrants stated that they would like to set up their own small business in Armenia. Some had even tried, but had failed. Most of them blamed the tax agency and other state bodies for this failure. Others noted with pain that, during their labour migration, they had not saved enough money to set up their own business.

Some of the respondents had returned to their villages and were either farming or working in construction in the nearby towns. The majority of returnees that had found employment complained of low wages, but was still happy to be close to their families.

Several of the respondents regretted having left Armenia and thought that, had they not left, they would have been able to make a living in Armenia and to be close to their families.

“I now regret having left. Those years were wasted. Here, I would have at least been with my family, I would have done something, like all others do. At my age, people want to lead a quiet life; there, I was very strained because of my work, status, and being homesick.” Man (age 53) from Arpi

As for the difficulties of reintegration, the majority of the respondents claimed not to have had any psychological or cultural problems since their return, because they were returning to their birthplace, a place where their relatives lived.

“I did not have any problems. I came to Armenia, and my heart fell back in its place. A man is only a man on his own soil.” Man (age 53) from Arpi

This is partially explained by the fact that the vast majority of these migrants had gone for seasonal work and continued to spend several months a year back in the home country.

Adaptation was relatively more difficult for migrants to the USA or Europe, as the differences between those countries and Armenia in terms of lifestyle and customs are far greater than the differences between former Soviet countries (including Russia) and Armenia. Besides, migrants to the USA or Europe spent several years in their respective host countries, never returning to Armenia during that period.

“All I wanted was to be at home. I felt horrible whenever I left the house. The people were beasts: no respect for each other, no conceding. I still cannot put up with it.” Woman (age 50) from Yerevan

“It was initially difficult. I was sad, thinking why people in Armenia are like this, why our country is so backwards, why things are so difficult here. Now, I have gotten used to it; I don’t even notice the difference, though I personally

keep many of the habits I picked up in the USA (for example, I never throw garbage on the street).” Man (age 25) from Yerevan

Employment was an essential factor influencing reintegration: adaptation was easier and quicker for migrants that had found employment. The migrants that were still without permanent employment reported feeling useless.

RE-EMIGRATION PROSPECTS

Clearly, the returnees' intention to leave the home country again largely depends on their employment in Armenia: migrants that were able to find employment that enabled them to meet at least the basic needs of the family said they did not wish to leave, as they felt better, free and secure here.

Some migrants, though unable to find employment here, still say that their age or health status does not permit them to become labour migrants again.

Migrants that are able to leave and are yet unable to find well-paying or permanent employment say that they will probably re-emigrate, if they do not find employment within the next few months. Such migrants mostly say so with pain, because they do not wish to live away from their families and relatives again.

STUDENT MIGRANTS

THE STAY ABROAD

This component of the survey was aimed at studying the issues faced by students educated abroad during their resettlement in Armenia. The survey was carried out among 20 “student migrants” that had taken part in various exchange programs and attended the undergraduate or graduate programs of American and European universities. Only two of the respondents had left at their own initiative. The duration mainly lasted from 10 months to two years. In the majority of cases, the education programs granted the student a scholarship covering the tuition, transportation, often also residence in the foreign country, the acquisition of literature, and other expenses.

According to the findings of the survey, several of the respondents applied for a program having earlier participated in another one: for instance, after studying in the USA, they applied and studied in European universities, or the other way around. The respondents had applied for educational programs while studying or after graduating

from Armenian universities. The family members of these respondents were not engaged in the migration process.

The interviews showed that, when leaving Armenia, the respondents had mainly intended to study abroad and return to Armenia, which is a precondition of educational programs: once they graduate, students must return to their country of origin. Nevertheless, some of the respondents had not ruled out the possibility of staying abroad prior to their departure.

“I was primarily leaving to study, but did not rule out the option of staying. Whichever worked.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

The students that studied in Hungary, for instance, had ruled out the possibility of staying, as they had language problems (no knowledge of Hungarian) obstructing their settlement there. As for the choice of the country, the respondents said it was connected with the relevance of specific programs.

When leaving, the respondents were expecting to obtain new knowledge, skills, and a Western education, to interact with another culture, to change their mindset and view of the world, and to establish new contacts. They were sure that Western education would support their professional advancement and make them competitive in the Armenian labour market.

“I was leaving only to study and return. I thought that, after I left and studied, I would be able to open many doors in Armenia, and it was the only reason why I left, wanting to have a more secure and better living in Armenia later.”
Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

The responses indicate that the respondents’ expectations in terms of their education abroad were mostly met.

Among the difficulties encountered especially in the initial period of their education, the respondents mentioned homesickness, the difficulty of communicating in a foreign language, the differences of the education system (*more independent work and a heavier academic burden*), problems of intercultural communication, and the like.

“...Another reason why it is difficult here is that, unlike them, we don’t have a “resume”; they know nothing about us, and every time, we have to present ourselves anew. In Armenia, it is different: wherever you go, your “visit card” follows you, as people know your worth, if you have studied or worked somewhere, or have been recommended by someone.” Woman (age 32) from Yerevan

Adapting to the new conditions was eased by advice from acquaintances that had earlier studied under the same program, as well as pre-departure orientation courses offered by some of the programs, covering the various aspects of the program, the country, its culture, and so on. Some of the respondents that had studied in the USA thought that the social and educational systems of the USA made their adaptation easier. Some students had prior experience of studying abroad, which had helped them to organize their life more easily.

RETURN AND RE-INTEGRATION

As mentioned earlier, the return of student migrants was a requirement of the programs. Though the number of students intending to stay abroad grew during their studies, and some even made such attempts, they were unable either to find employment, mostly due to the shortage of time, or to prolong the duration of their lawful stay, not wishing to break the laws of either the foreign country (by becoming illegal aliens) or Armenia (by avoiding military service).

“...I thought of staying there, because I had no prospect back here. Had I been offered good employment and a way to make my longer stay lawful, I would have stayed.” Woman (age 32) from Yerevan

Very few students had the clear intention to return and live in their home country.

“Studying there should not be confused with living there. That country did not suit my character. Everything is automated there: one becomes a machine. Besides, life there is too strained. Friendship is different over there, though I had many good friends that resembled my Armenian friends. However, friendship over there is different. People can be very nice to you, but you can never be sure that they will help you in times of trouble. Besides, if I have a child, I will not want my child to grow up over there. I don’t like their customs; there is no respect of adults, and children do whatever they like.”
Woman (age 23) from Yerevan

The respondents stated that, prior to their return to the home country, they had very high **expectations**. They mainly expected to have good employment with a high salary and, most importantly, to find demand for their knowledge and experience.

...At first, I was very inspired, thinking I would be embraced with open arms.
Woman (age 29) from Yerevan

The respondents generally held a positive opinion of their student experience abroad, as they had acquired a new profession or deepened their professional knowledge and acquired new skills and experience, which led to changes in their personal traits (a change of mindset and view of the world, ability to work diligently, self-confidence, independence, and a greater sense of responsibility).

“I highly appreciate their education system in several respects: firstly, I changed as an individual, because, having come into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds, I felt my view of the world change and I gained intercultural communication skills. Besides, I have become more self-confident.” Woman (age 21) from Yerevan

The respondents frequently mentioned the acquisition of skills in areas such as research methodology, as well as analytical abilities, IT skills, inter-personal and intercultural communication, negotiation, reporting, and writing essays and papers. They use these skills in everyday life in both their relationship with other persons and the work process.

Besides, not all the respondents' **expectations were met**, because immediately after their return, they encountered various **problems**, of which they most frequently note the **social-psychological and the work-related problems**.

Some of the social-psychological problems had to do with **living conditions, social relations, the education system, the mindset, and the existence of cultural and other differences**.

“It was difficult; I could not adapt to the way people treated each other here, the attitude of service providers, and the absence of any respect. When you cannot adapt, you take everything more sharply, but later, you learn to ignore or bypass a lot of things.” Woman (age 25) from Yerevan

Education system difficulties were encountered by the students that, after return, continued their education in Armenian universities: **most of these difficulties were connected with** the old education system, the poor practical component of studies, and the like.

“For me, the greatest difficulty was going through the remaining two years of university, because the styles and methods of education here and there differ greatly, and I could not adapt. It seemed so meaningless to me to have to write down and then recite whatever I was being told, with no one being interested in my opinion or my position on issues. Besides, the knowledge here

does not have any practical relevance, and once you get a job, you have to learn the practice from scratch.” Woman (age 22) from Yerevan

Some of the respondents noted that they had difficulties in their relationship with family, which, in their opinion, was due to them **having become used to an independent lifestyle** during their studies abroad.

“I had difficulties regarding my family. I had become accustomed to being independent, but here, they demanded me, for instance, to be home by midnight.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

Some noted the **problems encountered in daily life because of differences in culture and the mindset**. These were problems connected with bureaucratic red-tape, the poor quality of services, corruption, and impoliteness.

“After returning from abroad, we started to notice many things, which we had not noticed before.” Man (age 24) from Yerevan

“I had not been to Armenia for two and a half years and, in a sense, I had become detached from the reality, and was looking through pink glasses, especially as I was very homesick.” Man (age 33) from Yerevan

However, in some cases, respondents that had not lost ties to relatives and the Armenian reality and had previous experience of studying abroad and readapting to Armenia found it much easier to resettle and overcome those difficulties.

“I knew very well the situation in Armenia. I have never looked through pink glasses. Besides, communications are so much more affordable now that one can easily keep in touch with relatives, read the news in the Internet, and the like. While studying abroad, I never felt detached from Armenia. Besides, I benefited greatly from my previous experience of being abroad and returning to Armenia.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

Only some of the respondents had prior knowledge of what they would be doing upon return (continue their studies or work in Armenia).

The greatest problem encountered by the respondents was that of **finding a job**. Not all had succeeded in finding their desired employment immediately after return. Many had stayed jobless for months, as the jobs offered to them often did not correspond to their education or requirements (high wages and possibilities of professional advancement within the organization).

“Searching for a job was taking a lot of time. Either there was no employment, or the jobs offered were such that I could not force myself to

work. I studied for so many years not to perform low-paying non-professional work. Many of my fellow graduates are competent, but are jobless, doing translation work, because no employment is available. It is painful, because they will do translation work for another couple of years, after which they will leave Armenia, and we will lose competent individuals.” Woman (age 27) from Yerevan

Some respondents noted that they could not find employment in Armenia corresponding to their **professional education** abroad. This was due to a number of factors. Firstly, their professional experience was rather academic. Secondly, they did not have relevant work experience. Thirdly, there are limited possibilities for them to work and advance in their professional spheres. And fourthly, their professions were very specific and not in high demand in Armenia.

“...The problem here is the scarcity of professional development and advancement possibilities. Here, you depend on your work. If there is something about your work, which you dislike, you cannot easily change your work, because there are not too many opportunities of employment, and it would take too much time to find something new. You are even more dependent on your work, if it pays well and is good work. This is the problem, and this is why people leave.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

“I think I have used about 15-20% of the knowledge I obtained, because I am not working in my professional sphere. My current occupation has nothing to do with political science. However, I still use the skills acquired abroad, as they would be necessary to perform any work. I also use my language skills.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

Only a few respondents mentioned that the professions they had obtained abroad enabled them to find suitable employment.

“They phoned me up, because I knew the SPSS program, and offered me a job... A diploma from a foreign university is always an advantage, so I passed the selection very easily. I was responsible for 12 employees. Then, I continued working in another project of the same organization. I had database skills, which I regularly used. The foreign diploma and language skills add a lot to one’s competitiveness. Now, there is strong demand for social scientists; at the time, the CEU was the only foreign university where Armenians could get a degree in social science.” Woman (age 29) from Yerevan

“My thesis was on Armenia and the Diaspora. There, I thoroughly studied development theories based on the example of various countries. My current work is related to community development, and I am able to use my knowledge here.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

On the other hand, some believe that, regardless of profession, the knowledge of a foreign language (English) and having a “foreign” degree already provide a very good opportunity to find employment in Armenia.

“...Having studied abroad changes a lot. I have personally felt my advantages in terms of knowledge and work skills. They gave me my current job without testing my knowledge, simply because I had an MBA from the United States.” Woman (age 32) from Yerevan

The respondents are mainly engaged in various projects of international organizations or in the banking sector. Some mentioned that it was difficult to work in different projects, because they are often in different sectors, and it becomes impossible to concentrate and develop skills in one professional sphere. Besides, such projects, being temporary, force specialists to constantly search for new employment. Therefore, there is already a trend of transfer from international organizations to the private sector, as the latter is more competitive and stable, and provides opportunities for growth.

The respondents mentioned the problem of **social injustice** in recruitment: often, what is taken into account is not the person’s knowledge, skills, and experience, but rather, **another set of factors**.

“Here, they don’t care about your diploma; they may as well offer you a secretarial job. You can go to any ministry, but they will probably not recruit you, unless you know someone. Even if you are recruited without a crony, you cannot advance. They do not appreciate the value of education. Here, they do not offer a prospect of advancement in Armenia. You can only work in international organizations. There are no suitable positions to apply for. I have applied to a couple of places, though I really did not want to work there; however, I was already tired of sitting at home jobless. I also applied to an organization that offered me a salary of only 200 US dollars a month.”

Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

The majority of the returnees noted that they were disillusioned for **not being either valued or demanded in the home country**, and for **not seeing any prospects**: they

had expected that their education would be appreciated and they would be able to apply their knowledge.

“If there is any possibility of professional growth...I would be happy to work in any ministry, had it not been for that atmosphere. I would engage in policy making and implementation. In other countries, the only place for constant professional growth is the public sector, but in Armenia, this is not the case.”

Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

The impression is that the returnees are not employed in the public sector, because the latter does not appreciate them.

Some of the returnees that studied abroad do not wish to work with a low salary (*for instance, anything less than 1,500 US dollars a month*). However, it is not easy to find a better-paying job in Armenia.

“It seemed like the investment in education was not justified, as I did not feel to be in demand. It was difficult for me to find employment, because the jobs I was considering were not suitable. They offered me a salary that did not reflect the worth of my education.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

Naturally, they search for ways to overcome these difficulties. One of the most common scenarios is the desire of student migrants to interact with graduates of similar educational programs, to participate in meetings, and to carry out joint projects. Besides, employment in international organizations helps, as the atmosphere there is similar to what they have experienced abroad.

“The international organizations are not too different from our experience abroad, and it helps to adapt, as the shock is not significant.” Woman (age 27) from Yerevan

RE-EMIGRATION PROSPECTS

According to the findings of the survey, the majority of the respondents have not precluded the possibility of migrating again in the future. However, they do not intend to migrate just for the sake of leaving Armenia; rather, they perceive migration to have a specific purpose, such as getting a Master's or post-graduate degree or finding employment abroad.

“I am going to leave. I do not want to stay here. I have two options: either to find employment, or to travel to study. There is a third option of living

illegally in Glendale and washing dishes, but I am not interested in such a prospect.” Woman (age 24) from Yerevan

“I do not see how I could develop my knowledge in my current sphere of employment. My work definitely cannot give me more. This is perhaps the reason why I am trying to run away. Here, the doors are not closed for me, I could become a senior professor, but I do not consider it efficient.” Woman (age 25) from Yerevan

The possibility of re-emigrating was not precluded by those that were currently satisfied with their employment and students that had recently returned to Armenia and had the obligation to stay in Armenia for at least two years. However, some try to use the opportunity of studying abroad again (by applying to education projects) as a way of leaving Armenia.

“I intend to do a Master’s degree abroad. It is not so much my eagerness to learn; rather, I want to move a bit further away from Armenia.” Woman (age 21) from Yerevan.

Two of the respondents not only intend to leave, but also have made specific steps by applying to the Canadian HSMP (High Skilled Migration Program), which they consider “a form of civilized migration.”

To sum up, the impression is that, had it not been for the program requirement to return after the education and to stay in the home country for some time, the majority of the student migrants would have used the opportunity to settle abroad. Besides, even after their return, they still want to leave Armenia.

Some want to leave Armenia again, because, when they originally chose a profession, they failed to take into account the requirements of the Armenian labour market, which now makes them unable to find employment in their professional spheres in Armenia, and they only find employment owing to their foreign diploma or certain skills.

Some others intend to re-emigrate, because, in spite of having employment in their respective professional spheres in Armenia, they feel unappreciated in their home country, consider the possibilities of professional growth limited, and feel that there is no prospect. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of the young people that studied abroad keep the prospect of leaving Armenia on their minds and are trying to use various programs in order to re-emigrate.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

MIGRATION RATES AND DESTINATIONS

The data acquired through the Returnee Survey 2008 confirmed that **in the period between 2002 and 2007 labour migrants dominated the external migration flows from Armenia**. This is to say that the situation has significantly changed since the beginning of 90's when between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people permanently emigrated from Armenia and joined the sizeable Armenian Diaspora groups in Russia, Ukraine, USA and countries of Western and Eastern Europe.

- The survey allowed estimating the total number of people involved in external migration processes in the specified period of time at $230,000 \pm 15,000$, of which $175,000 \pm 13,000$ left Armenia with a purpose to find employment abroad. The majority of them engaged in labour migration more than once. Since January 2002, each labour migrant conducted on average 2.5 trips abroad. Labour migration involved every fifth Armenian household. In more than two-thirds of cases one member of the family had left to work abroad
- According to the survey results, the number of people who left Armenia with a purpose to permanently reside abroad did not exceed 37,000. Permanent migration involved 2-3% of Armenian households. Unlike labour migration, permanent migration usually involved more than one member of the family. Student migration involved less than 1% of the Armenian households. The number of student migrants was estimated at $7,000 \pm 3,000$.

Migration flows also became much less diversified in terms of countries of destination. Due to many reasons, the Russian Federation has become the main destination for Armenian migrants.

- The Russian Federation was the most popular destination for all migrants. Among labour migrants, 96% travelled to Russia. Russia was also clearly the main destination for permanent migrants, 71% of them have settled there. The situation is more mixed with student migration: more than half of student migrants (56%) went to study in Russia, but 26% went to the European Union.

SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE MIGRANTS

Over the last decade, **migration from Armenia has transformed from a desperate effort of families** to escape the severe consequences of the economic and social downfall **to an individual quest of fathers** to earn better living for their families back in Armenia. High migration activity of middle-age men reasonably affects the demography of Armenia and may, in a longer run, result in labour shortages.

- The survey recorded that 79% of all migrants, 90% of labour migrants and 51% of permanent migrants were men. Women prevail among student migrants; however this flow has been very small to affect the general proportions. According to 2001 census data, men constituted 47% of Armenia's de jure population (ages 16 and above). Due to the gender-misbalanced out-migration, the proportion of men in de facto population of Armenia has decreased to 42-44%.
- High migration activity of middle-age population (ages 25 to 54) affects the age structure of the population in Armenia. Among migrants, the proportion of this age group is 79%, while among the rest of population it is as low as 51%. The mean age is 38 for migrants and 44 for those who were not involved in external migration processes in 2002-2007.

While people with higher levels of education have better access to the Armenian labour market and hence tend to show lower migration activity, in the period of 2002-2007, **about 10% of Armenia's skilled labour have left Armenia for better opportunities abroad.** With the exception of the construction sector, it does not seem that the absence of skilled workers in Armenia currently leads to lower quality and/or quantity of output. However, the situation may change over time, and the findings of the survey should alert the policy-makers on possible negative effects of skilled labour emigration.

- External migration processes involved 11% of people with secondary education, 10% of those with vocational education and 9% of those with tertiary education.
- The total number of Armenia's adult population with vocational and higher education was estimated at 900,000 ± 25,000. The survey reported that, overall, in the period of 2002-2007, about 10% of the skilled labour or 90,000 people have left Armenia for better opportunities abroad.

Migration activity does not depend solely on the competitiveness of certain professional groups in the domestic labour market. More often than not, the choice between staying in Armenia and migrating is conditioned by the signals from the foreign labour markets and/or by the gender breakdown of various professional groups.

- Specialists of Architecture and Construction, various Engineering professions and Transport have been showing highest migration rates: 12-19% of these professionals have left Armenia at least once over the last six years to try and find employment abroad. Their high migration activity is conditioned by the specifics of demand for highly skilled labour in the destination countries and mainly in Russia. Although the demand for most of these specialists has recently increased in the Armenian labour market, better employment conditions abroad (most importantly higher level of wages) encourage their decision to migrate.
- The signals from the foreign labour markets seem to have less effect on the Armenian IT specialists. One of the reasons for low migration activity of IT specialists (6%) is that there is a competitive local demand for highly qualified specialists in the IT sector. Another reason, why IT specialists choose to stay in Armenia, is that unlike other sectors such as construction and care services, IT services are not localized, i.e. they can be outsourced, and many Armenian IT companies work for foreign clients.
- The moderate migration activity (6-9%) of economists, doctors, teachers and specialists of Humanities and Social Sciences (predominantly lawyers) has a different explanation. These four groups alone represent 52% of the Armenian skilled labour and the Armenian labour market clearly cannot absorb all the labour available, which is reflected in high unemployment rates of these professionals in Armenia. Nevertheless, the labour markets of key destination countries are equally not ready to take many of them in. Hence, one of the options that some of these specialists choose is to take less skilled jobs available in the foreign markets.
- Low migration activity of food technologists and specialists of Textile and Light Industries (5-6%) is mostly conditioned by the gender breakdown of these professional groups. Overwhelming majority of these specialists are women. Although over 40% of them are unemployed in Armenia, there are very limited opportunities for them to find employment abroad.

Being largely motivated by lack of access to the local labour market and low wages, **migration continues to attract people from regional towns and villages, while least affecting Yerevan.**

- Labour migration flow was dominated by rural population of Armenia (44%); 23% of the labour migrants were living in Yerevan and one third in other urban areas. Among permanent migrants, 45% were from regional towns, 28% from Yerevan and 27% from the rural areas. Majority of the student migrants were residents of Yerevan (58%) and only 8% represented the rural population.
- Labour migration rates were found to be highest in Shirak, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn, Vayots Dzor and Tavush. Gegharkunik and Tavush have also been most active in permanent migration, while Yerevan and Kotayk contributed most to student migration. Overall, Gegharkunik has been showing the highest migration activity with 15% of population participating in external migration processes in 2002-2007.

OCCUPATION AND INCOME IN THE DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The survey reported that the overwhelming majority of the migrants (90%) succeeded to find employment abroad. The employment statistics in Armenia allow suggesting that at least **30% of them would be unemployed if they chose to stay in Armenia.** Additionally, the survey allowed establishing that **the wage level of migrants abroad was at least thrice higher than they would have in Armenia.**

- In the period of 2002-2007 there have been approximately 460,000 cases of out-migration from Armenia. In 90% of these cases, the migrants found employment abroad. The employment rate was highest among labour migrants: only 4% of them failed to find jobs in the destination country. Although finding employment was not the main reason for migration of the permanent migrants, majority of them (60%) also succeeded to get employed. The employment rate has been very low among student migrants (28%), which is quite reasonable, considering the difficulty to combine work and study or to extend the duration of stay in the host country upon graduation.
- Between 2002 and 2007 the employed migrants earned an average of 660 USD a month. In contrast, according to the results of the survey, in the beginning of 2008 the employed population in Armenia earned a monthly

income of 66,000 AMD or approximately 220 USD. Although in both cases the level of incomes was most probably underreported, this data can still be used for comparative purposes.

Another question is the type and sphere of the employment. **The overwhelming majority of the migrants, irrespective of their professional background, worked as blue collars in the construction industry.** Hence, the majority of the skilled migrants, with the exception of engineers, construction and transport specialists, failed to find jobs that suited their professional background. This narrows the spectrum of knowledge, skills and technologies that could possibly be transferred to Armenia and could therefore limit the development potential of migration. Nevertheless, it is recognized that most of the migrants were ready to take any jobs available to support their families and the significance of their contribution to poverty reduction in Armenia should not be underestimated.

- In the overwhelming majority of cases (80%) the migrants took over jobs of skilled or unskilled blue collars (57% and 24% accordingly). Furthermore, in 70% of cases, the migrants worked in construction industry; in much fewer cases the migrants were involved in trade (10%), transport (6%), and manufacturing (5%) or provided private services, such as taking care of children or elderly (4%).

TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT RETURN RATES

The survey confirmed that in the period of 2002-2007 **the overwhelming majority of the migrants have returned to Armenia at least once and the annual negative net emigration has been insignificant.** The survey suggests that the return rate has been somewhat lower among those who left Armenia before 2002. **In both cases, however, Armenia predominantly witnessed temporary rather than permanent return.**

- In the period of 2002-2007, more than 80% of the migrants have returned to Armenia at least once. The return rate has been lower among those who left Armenia before 2002: 64% of them have returned to Armenia in 2002-2007.
- About 24% of the migrants or approximately 55,000 people have returned to Armenia in 2002-2007 and were not planning to re-emigrate in the near future. In other words, each fourth Armenian migrant can fall into the category of “permanent returnees”, assuming that the incidences of

permanent return are counted based on the number of migrants who do not plan leaving Armenia at least in 2008. Longer term projections seem irrelevant, since the respondents could not possibly be certain about migration intentions they might have in the more distant future. Another one fourth of the migrants (25%) have not [yet] returned to Armenia and can be thus considered permanent migrants.

- The survey recorded a minor negative net migration for 2002 and 2006 (3,000 and 7,000 people accordingly), and a minor positive net migration for 2003 and 2004 (1,000 and 3,000 people accordingly). In 2005 and 2007 the number of departures and returns has been almost equal. Although by the beginning of 2008 about 91,000 Armenian migrants were abroad, the data allows suggesting that few of these migrants would settle there permanently.

Temporary return rates have been highest from Russia. On the one hand, this is conditioned by very high temporary migration rates to Russia. On the other hand, the relatively low transportation costs and non-visa regime with the Russian Federation make it easier for the migrants to come and visit their relatives in Armenia. This breakdown changes considerably when only permanent return is looked at. Although Russia still heads the list of countries in terms of the absolute number of returnees, **the percent of returns from Russia with a purpose to permanently reside in Armenia is clearly the lowest among all destination countries.**

- Among migrants who left to Russia, 82% have returned to Armenia at least once in 2002-2007. The return rate was also high from Ukraine and other CIS countries (73-76%). In contrast, among those who left to Europe or USA the return rates were found to be as low as 55% and 47% accordingly.
- Permanent returnees are more frequently encountered among those who left to destinations other than Russia. Only 11% of the migrants to Russia have returned to Armenia with a plan to settle down in the country permanently. In case of other destination countries the permanent return rate varies between 14% (Europe) and 26% (CIS countries other than Ukraine). Permanent return rate has been quite high from the USA (20%).

SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RETURNEES

The survey allowed establishing that the gender breakdown of permanent emigrants and permanent returnees is the same. However, **those migrants that chose to permanently reside abroad are younger than those who decided to return to Armenia.** This suggests that most of the migrants make the decision to permanently emigrate at an earlier age, while the decision to return to Armenia is usually made later, possibly after several years of temporary labour migration.

- Among permanent migrants and permanent returnees, 72% are men and 28% are women. The percentage of women among temporary returnees is 15%. The mean age is 35 for permanent migrants, 38 for temporary returnees and 41 for permanent returnees.

Although the level of education was found to have no effect on migration and return patterns, a remarkable finding was that **the professional breakdown of permanent migrants, temporary and permanent returnees differed significantly.** This is largely due to the specifics of supply and demand of labour force in Armenia and abroad, as well as migration patterns of various professional groups.

- The percentage of persons with professional education is almost equal in the groups of permanent migrants, temporary and permanent returnees (39-40%). This is to say that the level of education does not seem to influence the migrants' decisions to return, and also that there is no explicit tendency for people with higher levels of education to permanently emigrate from Armenia.
- While economists of various profiles had the biggest shares in the groups of permanent migrants and temporary returnees, very few of them considered the opportunity to return to Armenia permanently. In contrast, the health and education specialists were quite active in permanent migration and permanent return, but showed very low temporary return rates.

OCCUPATION AND INCOME OF THE RETURNEES IN ARMENIA

The survey allowed drawing several important conclusions regarding the economic activity of the returnees in Armenia. First, **most of the permanent returnees try and manage to find employment back in Armenia.** This could further strengthen

their motivation to stay in Armenia rather than re-emigrate. Second, the **relatively high economic activity of temporary returnees suggests that most of them are actually looking for employment opportunities in Armenia**. So far, the majority of them have failed to do so. However, we think it safe to assume that finding jobs in Armenia could strongly encourage the decision of the temporary returnees to discontinue their migration experience and settle down in Armenia. Third, the difference between the employment rates of permanent returnees and non-migrants may lead to a conclusion that **migration experience increases the chances of job seekers in the Armenian labour market**.

- The data on employment of the returnees in Armenia suggests that about 60% of permanent returnees were employed in Armenia in the beginning of 2008. Among those who did not participate in external migration processes, the employment rate stood at 43%.
- About 70% of the temporary returnees who were in Armenia at the time of the survey, either worked (46%) or looked for employment in Armenia (54%).
- The majority of permanent returnees claimed during the in-depth interviews that their migration experience helped to improve their on-the-job skills, develop soft skills and hence increased their competitiveness in the Armenian labour market.

The survey has also established that the **wage level of returnees is somewhat higher than the wage level of the general population**. The higher level of income of the returnees may be conditioned by higher level of skills. Another possible explanation is that majority of the returnees work for the private sector, where the wages are by and large more competitive than in the state sector. Furthermore, a vast number of returnees found jobs in the Armenian construction industry, which has recently been having labour shortages and was therefore forced to increase the level of wages to attract skilled labour.

- The mean monthly income of the temporary and permanent returnees was estimated at 72,500 AMD or about 242 USD, which is approximately 10% higher than that of the non-migrants (66,000 AMD or 220 USD).
- About 47% of those who did not participate in external migration processes in 2002-2007 is currently employed in the state sector. In contrast, 58% of the employed permanent returnees and about 73% of the temporary returnees are working in the private sector.

- The survey recorded significant differences between the spheres of employment of returnees and the general population. This mainly concerns the level of involvement of returnees and non-migrants in construction. About 17% of the permanent returnees and 22% of the temporary returnees found jobs in the Armenian construction industry. In contrast, the percentage of non-migrants working in construction is as low as 7%.

MOTIVATION TO RETURN AND REINTEGRATION ISSUES

The in-depth interviews with returnees allowed suggesting that **return to Armenia was largely motivated by push factors from the destination country rather than pull factors to Armenia.**

- Circumstances such as loss of job (or end of the program in case of the student migrants), increased xenophobia and/or unacceptability of the social values (particularly in Russia) seem to have determined the decision of the majority of the returnees.
- There was, of course, one very important pull factor, which was the homesickness, and inability or unwillingness to reunite with the family abroad. It seems, however, that this reason alone has rarely been enough to encourage permanent return. More often than not, the migrants have chosen to continue their migration experience, returning to Armenia once in every 9-10 months to visit their relatives.

The findings of the qualitative survey allowed once again reiterating that over the last years **people who left Armenia were making a rational and primarily economically reasoned choice rather than being driven by the desire to leave the country.**

- The overwhelming majority of the migrants never had the intention to leave Armenia permanently. Most of them keep looking for good employment opportunities in Armenia and those who find such opportunities rarely hesitate to return.

Most of the problems connected with reintegration of returnees in Armenia seem to be conditioned by the **mismatch between their expectations and the reality they find back in Armenia.** This often results in re-emigration patterns. To encourage return it is undoubtedly important to provide migrants with up-to-date information on the emerging possibilities in the country. However, it is equally essential to

objectively communicate the problems the country faces, particularly those in the labour market. Balancing efforts to attract returnees and avoid re-emigration, however difficult, should be prioritized by the policy-makers.

- The in-depth interviews with returnees showed that many of those who have spent years abroad were expecting to find Armenia reformed and developed. Coming back they certainly noticed the improvements, however, of less scale than expected.
- One of the biggest problems that the returnees encounter in Armenia is the lack of jobs suitable to their skills, the lower than expected level of wages, and the lack of possibilities for professional growth. This most of all concerns younger migrants and particularly student migrants who return to Armenia after the completion of their programs. Most of them claim that their knowledge and skills are of little value to the Armenian employers and that there are very few “good” jobs available.