
CHAPTER 3. LABOR MIGRANTS: CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND

One of the attributes of any social process is the distinctive structure of participants or actors involved. Therefore, in this chapter we try to describe the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the labor migrants, which can help gain better understanding of the phenomenon of labor migration and making primary assumptions regarding its consequences.

SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIGRANTS

Gender and age breakdown

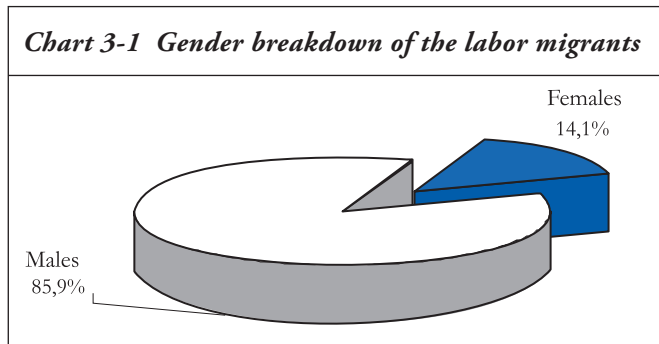
According to the survey, 85.9% of labor migrants are male, and 14.1% are female. The ratio of male labor migrants to the total male population aged 15 and above is 9.2%, whereas in case of females the same ratio is more than seven times lower (1.3%).

Extrapolation of these results to the general population allows us to estimate the absolute numbers of male and female migrants: 92,000-118,000 males and 11,300-22,300 females. If we narrow the universal set to the economically active population, this

data would mean labor migration of 10.9-14.0% of economically active males and 1.5-3.0% of economically active females.

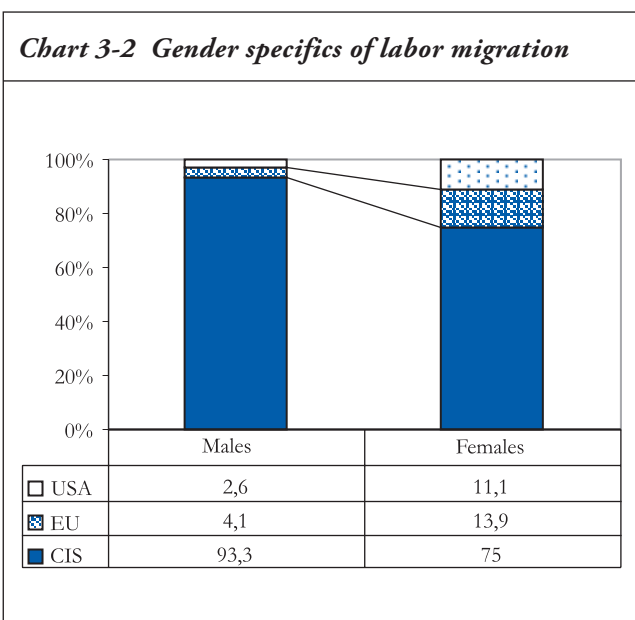
Such disproportionate gender migration is conditioned by many factors, and most importantly by national mentality, which still sees women at home while men take sole responsibility for the household income. The issues of social perception and attitudes towards labor migration of women will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

An important remark to be made here is that the migration activity of females strongly depends on their place of residence. While women comprise only 7.3% of labor migrants from rural areas of Armenia, the proportion of female migrants to the total number of migrants from urban settlements is as high as 17.3%. This outcome can be explained by the fact that the rural population is much less involved in globalizing processes and hence remains more conservative in terms of gender roles and equality. Moreover, in this sense it seemed quite natural that the gender specifics



of labor migration from Yerevan would differ from all other settlements of Armenia. Indeed, it appeared that almost each fourth labor migrant from the capital (24.0%) is female, which is twice more than in the other regions (12.1%).

While discussing the labor migration rates of males and females we would also like to refer to the data on countries of the migrants' destination. Although the majority of both males and females have traveled to CIS countries, an interesting finding was that the proportion of females who have worked in the EU and the USA is much higher than that of males (3.4 times higher in case of the EU and 4.3 times higher in case of the USA).



As far as the age structure of labor migrants is concerned, the overwhelming majority of them are of age 21-50 (86.6%) with the age group of 41-50 having the largest share: roughly each third Armenian labor migrant (34.2%) belongs to this group. The mean age of the labor migrants is 38.2; for males, 38.3 and for females, 36.4. The youngest age of both male and female migrants is 20; however the oldest male migrants are aged 69 and females are aged 56.

An interesting correlation was established between the age structure of Armenian labor migrants and the countries of their destination. It appeared that the mean age of those that work(ed) in the EU and the USA (44.8) is considerably higher than of those who migrated to the CIS countries (38.5). Besides, the youngest migrants that traveled to the EU and to the USA are accordingly 27 and 30 years old, while about 15% of those who left to CIS are younger than 25.

It was interesting to compare the age-specific characteristics of migration activity, i.e. to define which age groups tend to show lowest and highest involvement in labor migration process. Table 3-1 summarizes the findings both for the total sample of migrants and according to gender.

Table 3-1 Age-specific migration rates

Age group	Migration rate (ratio of migrants to total number of household members in the given age group, %)		
	Total	Males	Females
16-20	0,4	0,6	0,3
21-25	6,0	10,9	1,5
26-30	7,5	12,8	1,6
31-35	7,5	14,2	1,8
36-40	7,6	14,6	2,0
41-45	7,9	15,1	3,1
46-50	9,8	17,4	2,1
51-55	5,2	10,6	0,6
56-60	2,7	4,6	0,2
61-65	2,3	4,3	0,1
66 and above	0,8	1,3	0,1
Total	4,1	9,2	1,3

The table shows that starting from age 21 labor migration rates constantly grow and reach their peak in the age group of 46-50: each sixth Armenian of this age was involved in labor migration in the last three years. After 51, however the proportion is cut in half for almost all consequent age groups. At the same time females and males tend to show different levels of migration activity in certain age groups.

As shown the most “productive” age of males is 46-50, whereas the highest rate of labor migration of females is recorded in the age group of 41-45. At the same time, the migration rate of females starts declining already from the age of 46, while in the case of males it remains significant till the age of 56.

The majority of labor migrants (63.1%) were younger than 35 at the time when they first got involved in labor migration. Only 8.9% of them carried out their first trip when they were over 46. The youngest labor migrant was 17 years old and the mean age for first-time migrants was 32.8.

Marital status and family relationship

The overwhelming majority of migrants are married (81.7%), 14.9% are single, 2.2% are divorced and 1.1% are widowed. In most cases the migrant is either the head of the family (male) or his son.

Table 3-2 Relation of the migrant to the head of the family

Relation	Percent
Head of the family (male)	38,9
Wife	4,4
Son/son-in-law	40,7
Daughter/daughter-in-law	5,6
Other male relative	5,9
Other female relative	4,4
Total	100.0

Coupled with what was already said about the demographic structure of the migrants, these results indeed prove the statement that labor migration is nothing but “a unique quest of fathers aimed at fetching a living for the family”.¹⁷

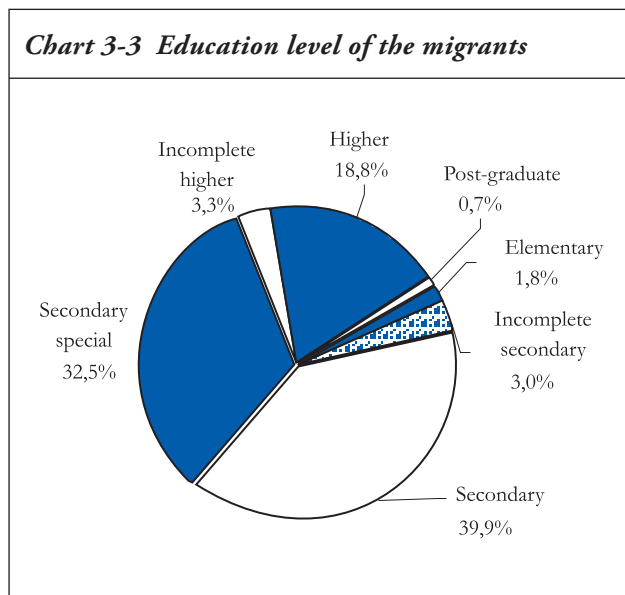
Education

The majority of labor migrants have either secondary or secondary special education (39.9 and 32.5% accordingly).

Approximately one-fifth of the migrants (19.5%) have higher education or post-graduate degree.

In addition, it appeared that the greatest migration activity is by people with secondary special education, and the lowest activity by those who did not finish a secondary school education.

Chart 3-3 Education level of the migrants



¹⁷ *Sample Survey of Passenger Flows at Border Crossing Points of the R.A.* NSS, 2002; quoted in *Labor Migration from Armenia. An Overview of Literature*. Ruben Yeganyan and Nelson Shahnazaryan, Yerevan, 2004.

Table 3-3 summarizes the ratios of migrants to the total population with a given level of education.

Table 3-3 Migration activity and education

Education level	Migration rate
No secondary	0,8
Secondary	5,3
Secondary special	7,7
Higher and post-graduate	5,7

Profession

By profession, 39.4% of Armenian labor migrants are specialists (people having acquired higher or secondary special education) in either of the following fields: engineering (15.1%), construction (11.2%), social sciences (8.8%), natural sciences (2.4%) and agronomy (1.8%).

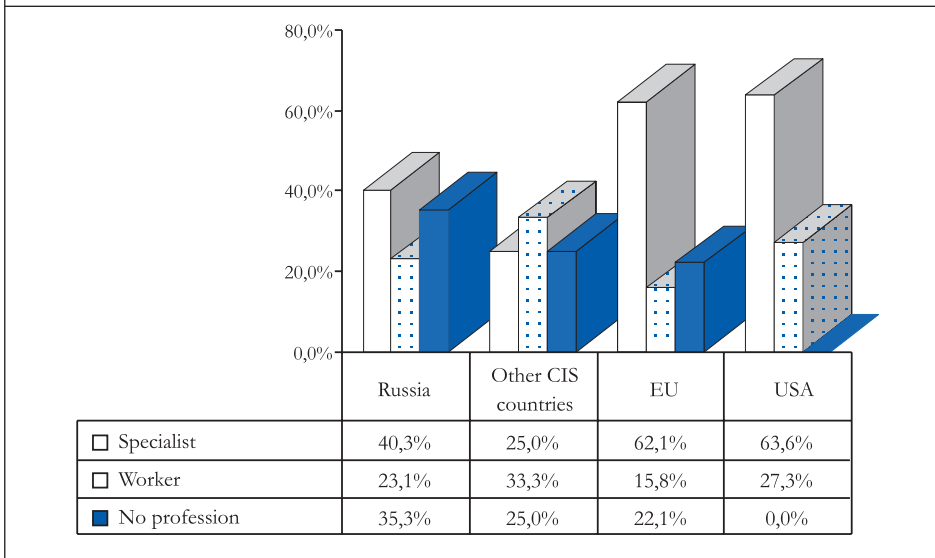
Next, by weight, is the group of migrants who do not have any profession; that is, they have not participated in formal education process after secondary school and hence have not obtained a certificate or diploma of professional education. Each third migrant belongs to this group (33.9%).

About one quarter of the migrants are skilled workers: drivers, bakers, carpenters, painters, woodworkers, etc. The remaining 2.4% of the migrants represent the fields of arts and sports.

Given the very small number of female migrants (only 39) it was impossible to draw solid comparisons between the professional background of males and females; however, the survey reported the following rough estimates: the proportion of specialists and skilled workers among male migrants is considerably higher than among females (1.5 and 6 times accordingly) and the percentage of females having no specialization is about twice as high as that of males.

Interestingly, though rather naturally, the professional breakdown of migrants to different countries has major distinctions. Thus, the majority of migrants to the EU and the USA are specialists with university degrees, and in contrast those that migrate to the CIS countries, mostly, either have no profession or are skilled workers. Moreover, all migrants to the USA have at least a worker's qualification. However, while in case of Russia the proportions reported by the survey should be rather accurate, the breakdown in other countries is likely to be rather imprecise due to limited information.

Chart 3-4 Professional background of migrants by countries of destination



Typical labor migrant

If we summarize the information presented in the subsequent sections of this Chapter, we could portray an average Armenian labor migrant as a 41-50 year old married male with secondary or secondary special education that most probably started seeking a job abroad at the age of 32-33.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY IN THE HOME COUNTRY

Employment record

Approximately half (50.7%) of the labor migrants were involved in some paid activity before their first trip abroad. Of this group, 64.6% had permanent jobs, and 35.4% were occasionally employed. This allows us to assume that at least for each third Armenian labor migrant the act of migration could not be conditioned on lack of workplaces in general.

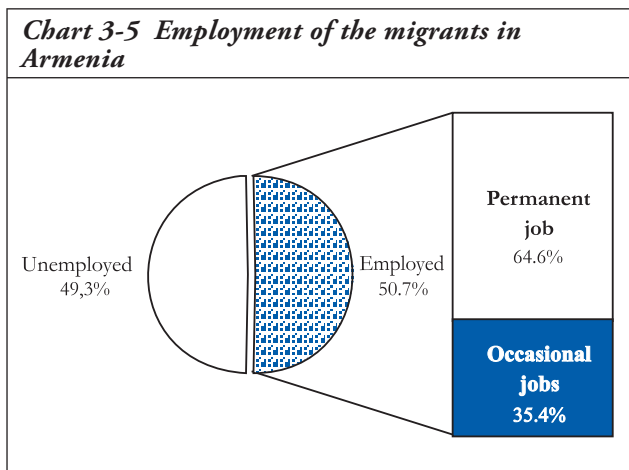


Table 3-4 presents the main spheres of the labor migrants' employment in the home country.

Table 3-4 Main sphere of employment in Armenia

Sphere of employment	Percent
Services	22,9
Construction	16,3
Agriculture	15,9
Trade/public food	15,4
Production	9,3
Transport	6,6
Education	4,4
Science	2,2
Art	2,2
Other	4,8
Total	100,0

As far as the status is concerned, the majority of the employed migrants (65.4%) were either skilled workers or white-collars (35.8% and 29.6% accordingly), 26.5% were self-employed (including farmers) and 8.0% were managers.

Average monthly income

According to the respondents, the average monthly income of their migrant relatives barely exceeded 100 USD at the time they worked in Armenia (80.3% of cases). Another 15.5% of the migrants earned incomes of 100-200 USD, and only 4.2% were earning more than 200 USD a month.

The calculated mean of the migrants' monthly income in Armenia is 97.5 USD. However, these earnings were the sole source of income for only 12.2% of the families. Moreover, in most of the cases (56.9%) the mentioned sum did not form even half of the household budget, constituting, on average, 37.0% of the gross family income for one month.

This important information allows us to approximate the average monthly income of the families that later got involved in labor migration processes. It appears that the household income was approximately 250 USD. With this estimation we can once again confirm the findings of other similar research in terms of stating that labor migrants mostly come from families with average income, rather than from low or high income groups. This is quite natural, since the lower economic class of population does not possess enough financial resources to afford the travel costs, while those who have high income in the home country apparently do not have the motivation to engage in labor migration.