
CHAPTER 6. ASSESSMENT OF THE MIGRATION POTENTIAL

As far as the results of the survey allowed, the current chapter projects both internal and external migration flows of Armenian population for the year 2005, including potential temporary and permanent emigration. With the necessity of extrapolation of the acquired data to the total population of the country, the findings presented are based on the main representative sample of households.

INTERNAL MIGRATION POTENTIAL

The survey showed that 5.1% of the members of surveyed households would like to move from their current place of residence to live or work in another settlement of the RA and mostly in Yerevan (3.0%). Of this group, 1.3% already plan to migrate in 2005 and 0.6% among those would settle in Yerevan. Converted to absolute numbers, this means that about 13.000 residents of the regions of Armenia will most probably settle in Yerevan this year.

In our opinion, the tendency of the population to move to the capital is conditioned by both objective and subjective factors. Yerevan certainly differs from the rest of the republic in terms of better lifestyle and wider opportunities; however the perceptions of the population regarding the drastic difference in living standards are rather exaggerated.

According to the survey, the migration flow to Yerevan will mostly involve migrants from regions situated close to the capital - Aragatsotn, Ararat and Kotayk (66.7%) and a smaller percentage of migrants from the disaster zone - Lori and Shirak (33.3%). The majority of the migrants to Yerevan this year will be younger than 34 years old, and will come from families with lower than average living standards.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXTERNAL MIGRATION

Attitudes towards permanent migration

The respondents were asked to express their attitude towards those of their compatriots who go abroad for permanent residency (using a scale of 1-4, with 1 meaning negative attitude, 2 – rather negative attitude, 3 - rather positive attitude and 4 – positive attitude). As a result, 39.8% of the respondents (the largest group) defined their attitude as clearly negative, which is about 1.5 times higher than the percentage of those who supported distinctly positive attitude (24.4%). However, combining “rather positive” and “rather negative” attitudes with the appropriate poles, it appears that the percentage of those who disapprove the phenomenon is not much higher than of those who approve it (52.8% and 44.8 % accordingly). With this we can conclude that Armenian society tends to have a mildly negative attitude to permanent emigration.

To understand which groups of the population tend to be positively or negatively disposed towards permanent emigration, we have correlated the attitudes with the variables of gender, education, type of settlement, presence or absence of migrants in the families, and living standards of the households. As expected, the strongest correlation was observed between the attitudes of the households and their involvement in migration processes. Unlike all other groups of respondents, families that were involved in labor migration mostly regard permanent migration as a positive phenomenon (54.9%). This finding is very important, because it allows us to assume that the respondents, for the most part, would not object if their family members who left the country to temporarily work abroad eventually stayed in the host country.

Furthermore, it appeared that females tend to be somewhat less loyal than males to those people that permanently leave the country: The proportion of negative attitudes in the case of females is 54.5%, while in the case of males it is almost equal to the proportion of positive attitudes (49.8%). At the same time almost the same breakdown is observed when comparing the attitudes of rural and urban population with the latter being more tolerant to permanent migration (50.7% of respondents as compared to 55.7%). This outcome is rather natural, if we consider that the migration rate from urban areas is much higher than that from rural areas.

Interestingly, there is a big gap between the assessment of people with no formal education and those with post-graduate education. While only 30% of the first group regards permanent migration as a positive phenomenon, an overwhelming majority of the second group (85.8%) has a positive attitude.

While comparing the attitudes of different social classes, it came out that respondents from families with high living standards demonstrated indifference towards permanent migration: within this group the percentage of negative and positive attitudes is the same (50%). This may be conditioned by the migration activity of different income groups (as mentioned in previous chapters higher than average income groups tend to show lower migration activity).

Attitudes towards labor migration

Unlike the ambiguous social perception of permanent migration, Armenian society tends to show quite a high level of solidarity in terms of attitudes towards labor migration. The majority of respondents (58%) have a positive and 28.4% have a rather positive attitude towards labor migration, meaning that the absolute majority of the population (86.4%) regards labor migration as an acceptable and commendable phenomenon. In contrast, only each tenth Armenian condemns those who look for employment opportunities abroad.

Let us now turn to discussion of the respondents' opinion regarding LABOR MIGRATION OF WOMEN in particular. It appeared that the overwhelming majority of Armenian population (78.1%) is still very intolerant towards the migration of females.

The respondents have mentioned different reasons behind their negative point of view. The most frequently mentioned explanations were that seeking jobs abroad contradicts the image of Armenian women (20.6%), that women should not leave the country (20.5%), or even that women should not work at all (13.8%). Another widespread opinion is that most of the women who go abroad engage in prostitution (10.4%). However, we are inclined to think that the latter argument is rather based on subjective stereotypes than on real life stories. Some other reasons why the respondents think women should not work abroad are that the migration of women destroys the family, that women must not go abroad alone, and that they can find a job in Armenia (2.3%).

It seems that the small minority showing a positive attitude towards labor migration of women rationalizes its opinion rather than supports it. 47.6 % of the respondents state that women can work abroad if they are forced to earn a living; 19.1% considers that women may work abroad if they cannot get employment in Armenia; 4.4% mentioned that women may go abroad if they get a good job offer and 3.9% stated that women might leave the country if they go with their husbands. Interestingly, only a few respondents (6.4%) referred to universal human rights stating that everyone has a right to work, irrespective of the gender.

Thus we can conclude that (similar to other situations) the social attitudes of Armenians towards labor migration are directed by cultural norms and traditions, rather than by social and economic rationale.

EXTERNAL MIGRATION POTENTIAL

Labor migration

The survey found that 6.9% of the members of surveyed households expressed willingness to leave the country to work abroad.

As far as the actual intentions are concerned, the results of the survey suggest that the labor migration rate in 2005 will be much higher than the average annual rates recorded for the period of 2002-2005. This will be mainly due to the following two circumstances:

1. The majority of the migrants that went back to Armenia in February 2005 (or their 77.5%) were planning to conduct another business trip before the end of the year. Thus, the absolute number of migrants who will carry out a regular trip abroad would be between 57,000 and 72,000 people.
2. New migrants will become engaged in labor migration: the process will involve about 8% of the families that did not have any family members working abroad in 2002-2005. In total, 1.8% of the members of these families stated that they plan to leave the country in 2005. This means a total of 48,000-68,000 new migrants.

In total, according to our projections, 105,000-140,000 labor migrants from Armenia (3.3-4.3% of the total population of the country) will try their luck in foreign countries in 2005. In our view, however, the fact that this estimate is about three times higher than the annual average calculated for the last three years must not be considered as a radical increase in labor migration rates. Firstly, both the actual and potential migration rates are based on the information provided by the respondents and not on factual registration of migration acts. Hence, the actual rates might be fairly underestimated, whereas the potential rates could be overestimated. We are inclined to think that not all of the planned trips will eventually be realized. This can happen both due to objective reasons and due to the fact that the respondents might state that some of their relatives plan to go abroad even in cases when such plans are quite vague. On the other hand, it is known that the respondents in general are more disposed to the discussion of plans (which does not assume any liability) rather than to the sharing of facts.

Most probably the gender and age structure of departing migrants will be similar to that recorded for 2002-2005. 88.4% of those who are planning to work abroad are males and 11.6% are females; and the majority of migrants will be of age 25-54 (73.5%).

Permanent migration

Regarding permanent relocation, 5.1% of the respondents' family members would like to establish permanent residency in foreign countries. At that, the projected rate of this specific type of emigration (percent of people that plan to move from Armenia in 2005) stands at 0.7%. Extrapolated to the general population this means 16.000-30.000 people (or 0.5-0.9% of the total population). Hence, in 2005 the labor migrants will comprise about 87% of the total volume of external migration.

Unlike labor migrants, those who will migrate from the republic permanently are mostly older than 45 (63.8%) and the majority of them are female (56.7%).