




Migration Trends in Armenia: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the study of the types of migration, the current challenges of emigration and immigration, and the reasons for migration in Armenia, as well as its consequences on the economy and demography. The methods of comparative studies, general scientific analysis, groupings, and generalizations were mainly used in the framework of the research. Emigration has become one of the most drastic challenges in Armenia for almost three decades. There are a lot of reasons for emigration to Armenia: social, economic, psychological, and security. From 2012 to 2019 about 91% of those who emigrated from Armenia were in the 15-59 age group, and more than 65% were in the 20-49 age group. The latter significantly influenced the formation of the age structure of the population. In other words, the negative impact of emigration has begun to be reflected in demographics as well.

Keywords: Armenia, migration, socio-economic conditions, demography, aging, labour market.

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INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of globalization, the international migration of the population is gradually becoming one of the most important factors in the socio-economic development of a larger number of countries, as it contributes to the formation of a more flexible market and the exchange of technologies. International migration also contributes to more efficient use of labour resources, interaction, dialogue, and mutual enrichment of different civilizations.

Generally, people migrate for many reasons: ranging from security, demography, and human rights to poverty and climate change. There are three major push and pull factors: socio-political factors, demographic and economic factors, and environmental factors (European Parliament, 2020).

Migration has a major impact on the economic development, tax revenues, and public expenditures of countries. At the same time, emigration implies a certain loss of previous investments in education for

donor countries. Because most young citizens leave the country, migration also harms demography, contributes to the aging of the population, the decline in the birth rate, and the decrease in the number of the permanent population which as a result often leads to a demographic crisis and a national security issue.

Emigration has been and continues to be one of the agenda issues of the Armenian government for almost three decades. From 1961 to 1976 the net migration balance was positive, reaching on average 13.9 thousand people annually which was due to the rapid development of the economy and ensured the mechanical growth of the Republic's population. About 15-20 years later, the picture changed dramatically. In the first half of the 1990s, the population outflow from Armenia reached its peak due to the war, the energy crisis, and the difficult economic situation. In the 1990s the balance of international migration in Armenia, was estimated to reach between 700 thousand up to 1 million people (Melkumyan, 2017, p. 42). Since 1995, although the migration balance has reduced, this

remained negative. Migration movements in Armenia are mainly due to socio-economic reasons, and also due to psychological consequences and security issues left after the 44-day war in Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) in 2020.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to study the positive and negative aspects of migration in developed and developing countries, and analyze the socio-economic situation of Armenia and its impact on the volume of migration, as well as to identify the consequences of migration on demographic processes.

The problems caused by migration are the focus of Armenian scholars. Thus, Vladimir Khojabekyan in his monograph “Reproduction and movements of the population of Armenia in the XIX-XX centuries, on the threshold of the XXI century” (2002) presented in detail the patterns of growth and movements of the population of Armenia, highlighted the problems of resettlement, movements, and occupation, analyzed Armenia's directions of interstate and intra-territorial migration flows of the population, as well as proposed principles aimed at mitigating the emigration.

In the study “External Labour Migration: Evaluations and Thoughts” (Tadevosyan *et al.*, 2014), the socio-demographic characteristics of the migration flow of Armenia, the directions of emigration flows, and the impact of labour migration on the socio-economic state of the country were comprehensively presented by the authors.

Koryun Atoyán's study “Influence of the International Labour Migration on a National Economy of Armenia” (2014) discussed international labour migration issues and revealed possible social and economic consequences of international labour migration.

In the article “Comprehensive Analysis of the Migration Stocks in Armenia” (Hakhverdyan & Vardanyan, 2020) authors analyzed the causes of migration, and its impact on the demographic situation, and also revealed a correlation between divorces and those leaving Armenia.

It is also worth mentioning the study “Economic Impact of Migration in the Republic of Armenia” (Manukyan, 2019), in which the trends of migration processes in Armenia, the positive and negative consequences of migration, its impact on the economy of the country, as well as the repatriation issues are discussed.

In general, currently there are two views on immigration. According to the first view, newcomers take the jobs of locals and contribute to their

unemployment. According to the second view, immigrants occupy the jobs where locals refuse to work due to harsh working conditions or low wages (Melkumyan, 2017, pp. 238-239). Without denying the existence of such issues, it is necessary to note that immigrants contribute their experience, knowledge, and skills to the economy of the host country.

Thus, it can be stated that the issue of migration and the academic discourse around it is a current issue and has its manifestations in each country, both in terms of socio-economic status and demographics.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study of the problems of emigration in Armenia and their manifestations were accompanied by a comparative analysis of academic literature, observation of the accepted methodology for calculating the indicators characterizing the levels of migration, poverty, unemployment, and urbanization. Taking into account the purpose of the article, the methods of comparative studies, general scientific analysis, groupings, and generalizations were mainly used. The statistical data and their databases of the UN, Eurostat, Statistical Committee of Armenia, and other organizations, official publications, as well as academic research in the field served as an information source.

The rates of migration in Armenia were analyzed between 1990 and 2020, and by age groups for the period 2012-2019, as the rates were available only for the given period.

The methodology for assessing the level of poverty in Armenia was introduced in 1996, then revised and improved in 2004, 2009, and 2019. Taking into account the abovementioned, poverty levels for Armenia were mainly presented between 2009 and 2018, and the period of 2019-2020 was considered separately due to a methodological change. As a result of the methodological change, the unemployment rate was also considered separately. The level of urbanization has been introduced since the 1960s.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Republic of Armenia, the modern risks of migration are presented and interpreted, as a rule, from the perspective of the change in the demographic situation, the tendency of different social strata towards emigration, the stability of stereotypes rooted in the society, the impulses of the labour market, the reduction of income disparity, ensuring a decent standard of living, and solving family problems and many other points of view (Marzpanyan *et al.*, 2016, p.12).

Social migration is very common in Armenia due to the strength of family and kinship ties which has historical roots. For centuries, the Armenian people,

having no statehood, were often governed by foreign administrations that they could not fully trust, and the function of national protection and ethnic identity was assumed by the complex extended family (Atoyán *et al.*, 2022). Today, the strength of family ties contributes to emigration in its way, with one family member taking others with them (“chain migration”).

Due to circumstances, Armenia has been a country of emigration for a long historical period. The number of Armenians in the world is about 10 million, of which about 3 million live in the Republic of Armenia. There are large Armenian communities in Russia, USA, France, and many other countries. A great emigration of Armenians took place in the XI-XV centuries. Emigration became massive, especially at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the constant persecution, repression, massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and especially the genocide against Armenians and other Christian indigenous peoples in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

Immigration to Armenia took place in 1828-1829 when about 50 thousand Persian Armenians and 100 thousand Western Armenians came to the Armenian Province of Eastern Armenia. During the Soviet years, the rapid socio-economic development of Armenia created favorable conditions for the organization of mass immigration. The most massive immigration took place in 1946-1950. As a result, from 1920 to 1991 the population of Armenia increased almost 5 times, from 720 thousand to almost 4 million.

In the last more than 30 years, many socio-economic, political, legal, moral and cultural and other negative factors in different sectors of Armenia, in particular, in 1988, due to the catastrophic earthquake, later, due to the regularly escalating Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict and the ongoing tension surrounding it, the lack of a sense of long-term physical security among the population and, especially in the border areas, the formation of feeling uncertain about the future, and incomplete protection of human rights, high levels of unemployment and other phenomena with the simultaneous effect, Armenia appeared at the center of an unprecedented emigration wave and complex demographic problems.

Within the framework of the research on external migration processes in Armenia from 1991 to 1998, it was calculated that the net emigration during the mentioned period was 760,000-780,000 people. The above mentioned rate was almost 20% of the country's population (Minasyan *et al.*, 2009, p. 5).

The trend analysis of the natural and mechanical growth of the population in Armenia from 1990 to 2020 shows that the population decreased by 551.6 thousand people or by 15.7% (Table 1), and the decrease was exclusively due to the negative balance of migration.

In fact, there are no published accurate statistical data on emigrants hence there is a gap between digital data from different sources.

Table 1: The trend of natural and mechanical growth of the population of Armenia, 1990-2020.

	Number of population as of the beginning of the year, mln. persons	Natural growth (person)	Mechanical growth (person)	Total growth (person)
1990	3.514.900.0	57889.0	1.711.0	59.600.0
1991	3.574.500.0	54400.0	4.400.0	58.800.0
1992	3.633.300.0	44757.0	-214357.0	-169600.0
1993	3.463.700.0	31541.0	-138541.0	-107000.0
1994	3.356.700.0	26491.0	-122891.0	-96400.0
1995	3.260.300.0	24118.0	-35618.0	-11.500.0
1996	3.248.800.0	23198.0	-25998.0	-2.800.0
2000	3.226.900.0	10251.0	-24151.0	-13.900.0
2002	3.208.300.0	6675.0	-23775.0	-17.100.0
2005	3.156.000.0	11120.0	-30320.0	-19.200.0
2010	3.055.200.0	16904.0	-53.204.0	-36.300.0
2011	3.018.900.0	15377.0	-12.877.0	2.500.0
2012	3.021.400.0	14881.0	-9.381.0	5.500.0
2015	3.010.600.0	13885.0	-25.885.0	-12.000.0
2019	2.965.300.0	9855.0	-15.455.0	-5.600.0
2020	2,963.300.0	X	X	X
Total	-	557.703.0	-1.109.303.0	- 551.600.0

Source: (Movsisyan *et al.*, 2022).

To understand the reasons for emigration in Armenia, the levels of unemployment and poverty were studied and analyzed (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

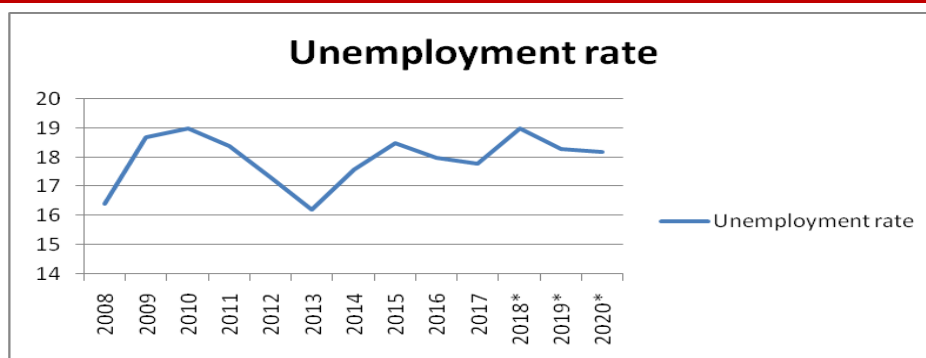


Figure 1: Unemployment rate in Armenia, 2008-2020.

Source: Compiled by the authors according to the data of the Statistical Committee of Armenia (<https://armstat.am/en/>).

Figure 1 shows that the unemployment rate in Armenia continues to be high, amounting to around 18 percent. Meanwhile, according to “RA 2014-2025 Strategic Program of Prospective Development”, it was

expected to increase the unemployment rate to 13.1 percent in 2021, and to 10 percent in 2025 (Government of Armenia, 2017, p. 76). However, achieving the target rates is still incomplete.

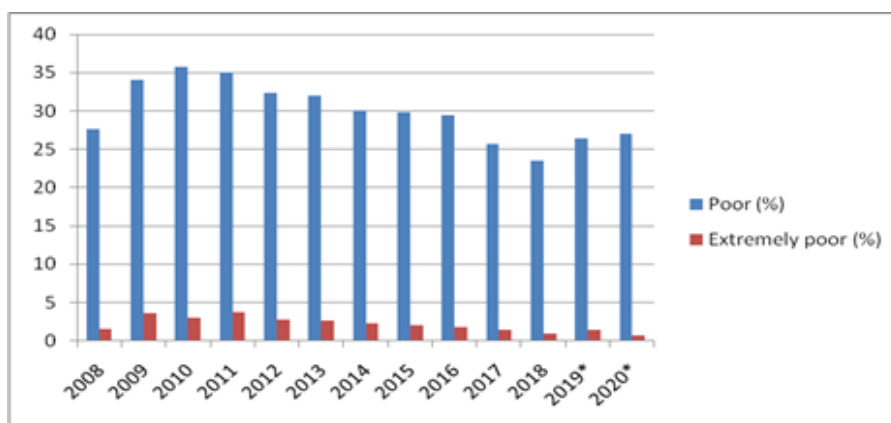


Figure 2: Poverty and extreme poverty rates in Armenia, 2008-2020

Source: Compiled by the authors according to the data of the Statistical Committee of Armenia (<https://armstat.am/en/>).

Figure 2 shows that in 2020, the poverty level in Armenia was 27 percent which increased by 0.6 percentage points compared to the previous year. As a result of disproportionate territorial development, we should consider the fact that poverty is higher in rural and regional urban areas. In 2020, in villages it was

estimated - 33.6%, in urban settlements - 22.5%. The poverty level in the capital Yerevan is 19.9% (Statistical Committee of the RA, 2021a).

In addition, even the poverty level among the employed is high in Armenia (Table 2).

Table 2: Labour force participation and poverty, 2008-2020 (%)

	Wage-earners (paid employees)	Self-employed	Other employed
2008	20,7	23,3	27,7
2009	25,5	29,7	34,1
2010	28	29,8	35,1
2011	26,8	28,7	34,7
2012	26,1	23,4	28,9
2013	25,6	24,4	26,7
2014	24,2	23,2	25,4
2015	24,1	22,6	23,9
2016	23,9	22,5	25
2017	21,4	20,5	22,1
2018	18,2	18,5	17
2019*	18,8	27,4	25,9
2020*	19,7	29,3	28,3

* 2019 and 2020 data is calculated using a different methodology and is not comparable with data from other years.

Source: Compiled by the authors according to the data of the Statistical Committee of Armenia (<https://armstat.am/en/>).

The data in Table 2 state that every fifth wage-earner is poor. In 2020, compared to 2019, the number of poor wage-earners increased by 1.1 percentage points. During the period 2008-2018, the highest share of poor wage workers was recorded in 2010, 28 percent, due to the negative consequences of the financial and economic crisis. As for the self-employed, one-third of them live in poverty. According to 2020 data, 23.5 percent were working poor in Armenia, and 0.5 percent were extremely poor (Statistical Committee of the RA, 2021b, p. 41). It should be noted that the situation is

more severe in rural areas. Unlike in urban areas where one in five wage earners was poor, in rural areas, one in four was poor. In this regard, there is a great risk that the latter may join the “army” of migrants in the future because they cannot get out of poverty even if they have a job.

The level of urbanization is also high in Armenia. If in the 1960s the urban/rural distribution of the population was 50 percent, and now the level of urbanization has reached 63 percent (Figure 3).

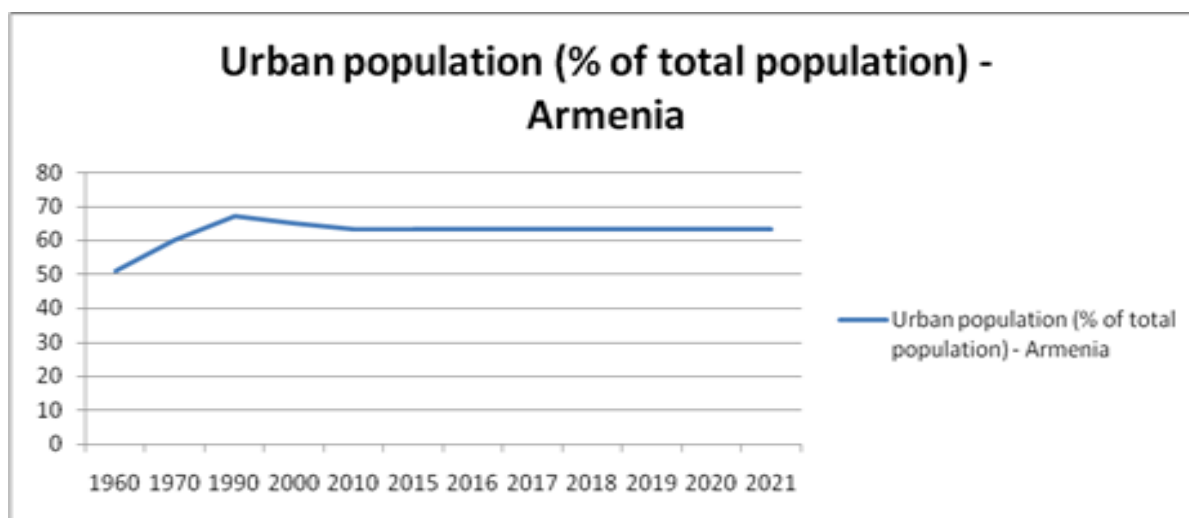


Figure 3: Urban population (% of the total population) of Armenia, 1960-2021

Source: The World Bank (2018).

In general, the rural population has always been characterized by a higher natural increase and became an important source of replenishment of the labour potential of the cities (Khojabekyan, 2002, pp. 210-214).

Not only the agrarian policy carried out in the villages, but also the transformation of other branches of the economy on an industrial basis, particularly the new connections manifested in industry and agriculture, has always had a certain influence on the movement, forms, and methods of the population from the village to the city. All of these were in a certain interdependent relationship with the urbanization of the population (Khojabekyan, 1989, pp. 1-47).

Studies have shown that although the state of electricity, water, and roads has improved in recent years, the outflow of citizens who took the path of

emigration from Armenia has not stopped at the same time.

According to Timothy Straight, the founder of “Homeland Development Initiative Foundation”, some factories that operated under the Soviet Union are now closed and there are no jobs which leads to an increase in the rate of emigration. He states that most of the jobs are concentrated in Yerevan, and residents of the provinces are inactive (Nahapetyan, 2015).

To understand the negative consequences of migration, we looked at the movement of the residual migration by age group. The analysis of statistical data showed that in 2012-2019 about 91% of those who emigrated from Armenia fell into the 15-59 age group. Moreover, more than 65% of emigrants were citizens of active reproductive and working age (age group 20-49, see Table 3) which significantly influenced the formation of the age structure of the population.

Table 3: The trend of the rest of the migration of Armenia according to age groups, 2012-2019

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	in %, to total
0-4	4	-14	-145	13	8	1	6	6	0.07
5-9	-12	-56	-386	-19	-14	-7	-1	-6	0.31
10-14	-10	-60	-717	-115	-112	-129	-113	-107	0.83
15-19	-987	-2669	-2172	-2561	-2485	-2331	-1953	-1691	10.28

20-24	-1830	-4756	-3194	-4573	-4470	-3906	-3241	-2587	17.42
25-29	-1361	-3448	-2941	-3804	-3634	-3401	-2632	-2248	14.31
30-34	-860	-2257	-2310	-2676	-2581	-2647	-1886	-1632	10.28
35-39	-731	-1873	-1894	-2093	-1973	-2115	-1473	-1237	8.17
40-44	-560	-1541	-1646	-1740	-1681	-1808	-1284	-1102	6.93
45-49	-743	-2065	-1831	-2193	-2129	-2048	-1522	-1251	8.41
50-54	-806	-2343	-1623	-2466	-2321	-2130	-1652	-1394	8.99
55-59	-539	-1429	-1083	-1790	-1601	-1555	-1102	-904	6.10
60-64	-273	-768	-536	-775	-687	-727	-494	-420	2.85
65-69	-252	-526	-558	-431	-320	-355	-310	-174	1.78
70-74	696	450	298	197	-128	-367	-319	-307	-0.32
75-79	-180	-258	-61	285	376	744	816	554	-1.39
80+	-937	-781	-1018	-1144	-1114	-1162	-1063	-955	4.99
Total	-9381	-24394	-21817	-25885	-24866	-23943	-18223	-15455	100

Source: (Movsisyan *et al.*, 2022, p. 65).

Many studies have been carried out in different years on the identification of the deep causes of migration in Armenia. Studies of the causes of emigration from Armenia show that the main reason for labour migration is the lack of jobs (whether it concerns stable, well-paid, or any job). In other words, the post-independence years are characteristic of Armenia as a period of labour migration. It should be noted that the remittances of labour migrants and the financial aid provided to Armenia by the “new diaspora” formed by the former citizens of Armenia who remained in the migration flows during the post-independence period (did not return to Armenia) have significant importance and direct impact on the development of the Armenian economy, and solving many socio-economic problems (Mkrtchyan, 2018, pp. 289-292).

According to surveys conducted by the Armenian branch of Friedrich Ebert Foundation among 1,200 young people in 2016, the following are the main reasons for the intention to move to another country (Mkrtchyan *et al.*, 2016):

- The desire to increase the quality of life - 35.6% of respondents;
- Better chance of getting a job - 30.8%;
- The desire to get a better education - 12.6%;
- The desire to live a more dignified life - 6.4%;
- Wider opportunity to start own business - 4.2%;
- Desire for greater cultural diversity - 2.5%;
- Desire to live in a safer state - 2.2%.

According to the results of another sociological survey conducted in 2018, as the main reasons for migration, young emigrants mentioned the lack of development prospects in Armenia, the obstacles to doing business, the undesirable moral and psychological atmosphere, and the unstable geopolitical situation (Nikoghosyan & Karapetyan, 2018, p. 42).

According to the Main Findings of the 2020 Integrated Living Conditions Survey (ILCS), during the

period 2015-2020, in general, 218.4 thousand members of households were included in migration movements. According to the Main Findings of ILCS, it was recorded that during the mentioned period, 42.3% of them left their settlements and did not return (departees), 41.5% returned from departures, and 16.2% were new arrivals to the given settlement. During the investigated period, the movement of around 38.5 thousand people (17.5%) of the migrant members of households was internal, within the territory of the country 86.7% of the departed migrants are male (Statistical Committee of RA and UN Migration Agency, 2022, p. 8).

A positive migration balance of Armenian citizens was recorded in the first quarters of 2019 and 2020. In 2019, the number of citizens who returned to Armenia exceeded the number of those who left by 2,526, and in 2020, by 18,609. However, it should be noted that since the beginning of 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it became almost impossible for Armenian citizens to enter other countries, and that was the main reason that according to the data of the first three months, the number of citizens who returned to Armenia was 18,600 more than the number of departures. As for 2021 data, then according to the data of the first quarter, 127,338 citizens left Armenia, and 63,625 returned. In other words, the difference between those who left and those who returned is 63,713. Obviously, compared to recent years, this indicator of negative migration is unprecedented (Fact Investigation Platform, 2021).

Thus, facing the challenges of migration in Armenia implies the development and implementation of such a policy which will be aimed at solving state and managerial problems. In particular:

- Implementation of the policy aimed at ensuring the physical security of the population of Armenia;
- Implementation of such a demographic policy that will promote population growth, improve

sex and age ratios, reduce the degree of the social burden on the population;

- Implementation of an effective population resettlement policy that will prevent the destruction of border and rural settlements and the dangerous over-concentration of the population of Armenia in the capital and nearby provinces;
- Implementation of a policy of socio-economic development in Armenia that will prevent irregular migration and promote the repatriation of emigrants who left Armenia;
- Carrying a monetary and customs policy that will promote the effective investment in Armenia of the financial means earned by working migrants who are citizens of Armenia.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the migration flows of Armenia, it can be stated that after the independence of the Republic, from 700 thousand up to 1 million people emigrated from the country, due to the dreadful economic situation caused by the war and the energy crisis. Although since 1995, the balance of migration has somewhat improved, it still maintains its negative balance and the Armenian government has not yet managed to take effective measures to prevent emigration and promote immigration. Migration movements in Armenia are mainly due to socio-economic and security reasons, in particular, high levels of unemployment, poverty, inadequate payment for work, the unsettled conflict in Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh).

The study of statistical data shows that every 5th wage-earner in Armenia was poor. In 2020, compared to 2019, the number of poor wage-earners increased by 1.1 percentage points. Unlike in urban areas where one in five wage-earners was poor, one in four in rural areas was poor. It can be assumed that the latter are potential migrants, and the Armenian government should develop appropriate measures in the form of decent wages, and social security so that the latter can get out of poverty and not think about moving to another country.

The analysis of the migration balance by age group shows that in 2012-2019 about 91% of those who emigrated from Armenia fell into the 15-59 age group. More than 65% of emigrants were citizens of active reproductive and working age (age group 20-49), which significantly influenced the formation of the age structure of the population. Thus, as a result of migration flows, which are significant compared to the population of Armenia, the following worrisome processes are taking place:

- The growth of the total population slows down;

- Irregular migration, especially the brain drain, threatens the national security of the country, the country is irrevocably deprived of a qualified labour force;
- About 1 million citizens already left abroad as a result of the external migration movement (which is 1/3 of the current population of Armenia) and continuing emigration has a serious impact on the family members and relatives remaining in Armenia, becoming a serious factor in promoting emigration.

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