



Migration Profile

ARMENIA

A. Executive Summary

Armenia is a landlocked country in the Caucasus region, known for its large diaspora all around the world. Armenia became independent in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, three years after the dramatic earthquake of 1988. At the end of 2020, the country experienced a war with neighbouring Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region that lasted 6 weeks. Though Armenia remains a country of emigration, the country nonetheless welcomed a number of Syrian-Armenians fleeing the Syrian civil war, and expedited their application for Armenian citizenship on the basis of their Armenian origins.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Armenia is a landlocked country spanning 29,743 km². It is located to the south of the Caucasus mountain range, and shares borders with Turkey (311 km long), Georgia (219 km), Azerbaijan (996 km), and Iran (44 km). A multi-party democracy and a nation-state, Armenia became independent from the USSR in 1991. The population of 3,011,609 (July 2021 estimate) is concentrated in the northern half of the country, where the capital city of Yerevan is home to 1,084,000 people, and the second largest city of Gyumri has a population of 121,976 (2019 estimates). According to 2011 figures, the country's ethnic demographics are as follows: Armenian 98.1%, Yezidi (Kurds) 1.2%, and other 0.7%. The religious affiliation of the population is reportedly: Armenian Apostolic 92.6%, Evangelical 1%, other 2.4%, none 1.1%, and unspecified 2.9%. Armenian is the official language and is spoken by 97.9% of the population. Nevertheless, Russian remains a widely spoken second language for many. Although a ceasefire with Azerbaijan was reached in November 2020 following the 6-week Nagorno-Karabakh war, tensions remain high across the southern border. The country suffers from occasional droughts and devastating earthquakes, the latest of which being the 1988 Spitak earthquake that reached a magnitude of 6.8 and caused as many as 50,000 casualties and 130,000 people to be injured.

II. International and Internal Migrants

With a -5.43 migrants/1000 population net migration rate according to 2021 estimates, Armenia has more emigrants than immigrants.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Armenia is known for the considerable size of its diaspora, which ranks the 7th largest in the world. Roughly 1 million Armenians live abroad according to the World Bank in 2019, representing a third of the population living in the country. More than half of the Armenian diaspora lives in the Russian Federation (530,00 people), and the rest reside in the United States, Ukraine, France, Uzbekistan, and Germany. These figures do not take into account the many people of Armenian descent who may not closely identify with Armenia, but still keep cultural ties with their ancestors' homeland. Though recent figures are challenging to obtain, studies point to the fact that the outward migrant flux continues. Figures from 2017 identify close to 250,000 international Armenian migrants (7.7% of the population). Among international migrants in Armenia, 170,058 are temporary migrants (5.4% of the population) and 74,451 are permanent migrants (2.4% of the population). Armenia largely benefits from the impact of the diaspora on its economy, with remittances making up to 14% of Armenia's GDP according to 2018 World Bank figures. This puts Armenia among the top 20 countries receiving remittances. Though the diaspora can be economically advantageous, the continuous flow of emigrants from Armenia remains problematic for the country. As the World Bank has pointed out, the out-migration of workers reduces the size of the labour force and exacerbates the aging of the society, causing intergenerational solidarity to weigh heavily on the shoulders of younger generations. The concentration of the diaspora in certain countries makes their earnings vulnerable depending on the economic conditions of those countries, as seen in the recent years of economic hardships caused by decreasing oil prices.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees)

According to the OIM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 caused 90,640 ethnic Armenians to be displaced from their homes, mostly from the regions of Shushi and Hadrut, which are now under Azerbaijani control. The UNHCR considers that this figure had decreased to 68,050 persons by February 2021, and classified them as a refugee-like population, 88% of which are women and children. One can deduce that the men generally opted to stay in their original homes or to go to war. Roughly 74% of displaced persons are hosted in urban settlements, while 26% are hosted in rural settlements. Approximately 39% of the displaced population have been registered in Yerevan, 18% in Kotayk, and 9% in Syunik. Around 87% of these individuals are reported to be in individual shelters and 13% in collective shelters, mostly in Aragatsotn, Lori, and Syunik.

According to the UNHCR's 2020 Annual Statistical Report, in Armenia there are 1,215 refugees from Azerbaijan, 1,086 from Iraq, and 741 from Syria. There are also 51 asylum-seekers from Iran, 9 from Cuba, and 5 from India. The Syrian civil war caused around 22,000 Arabic speaking Syrians with Armenian origins to seek refuge in Armenia, out of which 14,000 still remain in the country to date. Most of them are third generation descendants of people who escaped the Armenian genocide a century ago. Although Armenia's laws on refugees apply to Syrians of Armenian descent, the country set up a simplified path to citizenship for all ethnic Armenians, leading the vast majority of Syrian-Armenians to not seek refugee status and apply instead for Armenian citizenship. As

reported in the press, only a very small number of these Syrian-Armenians have been granted refugee status, with the rest having a mix of dual citizenship, temporary residency, and asylum-seeker legal status. Nevertheless, this positive situation implies that, under the safe third country doctrine, Syrian-Armenians will not be able to seek refuge in other countries. This group of Syrian-Armenians includes professionals such as doctors, engineers, IT specialists, and teachers, and many have business and artisanal skills that are valued in Armenia. The Armenian government has welcomed them with open arms, providing them with shelters, administrative support, and Armenian language courses.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Armenia, as well as Armenian victims living abroad. Armenians looking for employment outside the country, particularly in Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, face higher risks of forced labour, especially since they can be recruited by fraudulent agencies. Armenian women and children may also be exploited in sex trafficking in the UAE and in Turkey, as well as in Armenia. Children reportedly work in the agriculture, construction, and service sectors of Armenia, making them vulnerable to forced labour. Though precise figures are not available, women from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia who work as dancers in nightclubs in Armenia are also vulnerable to sex trafficking. The increasing number of Indian migrants also creates certain risks, as they seek employment in the precarious informal sector.

VI. National Legal Framework

Armenia was among the first ex-Soviet Republics to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, signing on in 1993. The country also acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 1994. Asylum and refugee status are governed by the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Refugees and Asylum. There are no difficulties in applying for asylum as it can be done in writing, orally, or in sign language after crossing the border, whether legally or illegally. The Red Cross provides all the necessary information regarding the rights of asylum seekers in the country. The asylum request is considered by the Migration Service on the basis of an interview. If recognised as a refugee, the person is granted the right to legal residency without any time limitation. They have the right to work without needing to apply for a permit, as well as the right to education, free movement, property, social security, and medical care. All persons who are recognised as refugees are eligible to apply for Armenian citizenship after residing on the national territory for three years. The article 13.3 of the aforementioned Law makes it possible for anyone of Armenian descent to apply for citizenship, exempting them from the need to spend three years in the country. This legislation, implemented by the Ministry of Diaspora, encourages Syrian-Armenians to apply for citizenship as soon as they can, instead of going through the refugee status application process. Articles 132 and 132-2 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia criminalise sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribe penalties of five to eight years' imprisonment. These sentences were deemed sufficiently stringent by the U.S. Department of State in its 2020 Report. The main administration in charge of the implementation of the legislation governing human trafficking is the

Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) of the Armenian Police, sometimes acting in conjunction with the Investigative Committee (IC).

VII. Main Actors

The State

Armenia is currently establishing a Ministry of the Interior, which would oversee the Police administration as well as the Migration and Citizenship Service.

The Catholic Church

According to 2011 census figures, there are 13,843 Catholics in Armenia, representing 0.46% of the entire Armenian population. This figure includes the Roman Catholics who follow the Latin rite and are part of the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus. It also includes the Armenian Catholics, who follow the Armenian rite and are part of the Ordinariate for Catholics of Armenian Rite in Eastern Europe. The Armenian Catholic Church is currently in a period of *sede vacante*, since the death of the former Patriarch in 2015. Since 2018, the Apostolic Nuncio to Armenia and Georgia is Monsignor José Avelino Bettencourt. Pope Francis made an Apostolic Journey to Armenia in 2016.

The main Catholic actor in Armenia is Caritas. Founded in 1995 by the Armenian Catholic Church with the help of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Armenian Caritas is a member of both Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europe. The organisation is based in the city of Gyumri, which is the seat of the Ordinariate for Catholics of Armenian Rite in Eastern Europe. Armenian Caritas employs approximately 230 employees and manages more than 80 volunteers. According to the website of Armenian Caritas, the NGO's seven main objectives are: the social protection of children; the social inclusion of people with disabilities; the social inclusion and care of the elderly; disaster risk reduction and emergency response; community development; migration and integration; and the institutional development of Armenian Caritas. CRS has long been active in the country, and has often transferred its projects to local partners. For example, CRS was involved in the founding of MDF-Kamurj, an independent microfinance institution in partnership with Save the Children's microfinance programs. More recently, Pope Francis donated medical equipment, including an ambulance, to the Armenian people to express his pastoral closeness and affection.

International organisations

The UNHCR provides humanitarian support to the most vulnerable, in the form of cash and other support like vocational training, micro-credit loans, tools to generate income, education in local marketing, counselling, and coaching. Following the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the UNHCR has joined with the UN Resident Coordinator's office to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugee-like population in Armenia. Under the joint leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator and the UNHCR, the UN Country Team has launched the Armenia Inter-Agency Response Plan.

Other organisations

The platform known as “NGO Center” provides a database of all active NGOs in Armenia, and assists civil society with training, consultancy, research, awareness raising, and capacity building programs and services.

Headquartered in Yerevan, the Armenian Red Cross society, which dates back to 1877, claims to be the only non-religious and non-politically oriented NGO on Armenian soil. If the NGO is guided by the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, it is also an auxiliary organisation to the government. Its actions include first aid, disaster prevention, population movement, social support, health care, and the dissemination of humanitarian values.

Mission Armenia was founded by a group of volunteers in 1988 in the aftermath of both the first Nagorno-Karabakh war and the disastrous earthquake. Ever since it has been providing community-based social-healthcare services to aid the elderly, the disabled, refugees, temporary asylum holders, and other vulnerable groups. Mission Armenia now manages 50 infrastructures that serve more than 8,000 beneficiaries in 22 cities in 8 regions in the country. The NGO works in collaboration with the Government of Armenia, local self-governing bodies, USAID, the UNHCR, and a number of other international organisations, as well as the sister branches of the NGO abroad. According to their Facebook page, a portion of the funding necessary for the activities of Mission Armenia has been provided by the Armenian Government’s Medium-Term Expenditures program, as well as by local self-governing bodies through cost-sharing agreements since 2007.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) has collected millions of euros from the Armenian diaspora since 2013, financing projects to integrate Syrian refugees in Armenia. SOS Children’s Villages in Armenia has been actively implementing its emergency relief programme (ERP), with the aim of easing the integration of Syrian refugees in Armenia, and working with more than 460 families and 800 children.

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