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Statistical data collection on migration in Armenia

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Introduction

Data on international migration movements to and from the Republic of Armenia (RA) is mainly collected by:

- The National Statistical Service;
- Armenian police departments;
- The Border Electronic Management Information System (BEMIS);
- Various governmental, public and social organizations in cooperation with international organizations (as e.g. UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, ILO, OSCE).

1. Detailed description of migration sources

In the RA the main data sources on migration are:

- Population census;
- Population Register;
- Migration records;
- Crossing border records;
- *Ad hoc* surveys.

1.1 Population census

According to the RA law “On population census”, the census is carried out by the National Statistical Service every 10 years. Since independence, two population censuses were thus conducted (2001-2011).

Materials from the first census were published in 2003 in 12 volumes. In the first volume indicators for the country as a whole were presented; in other volumes there were indicators for separate administrative units of the country: the capital city of Yerevan and the ten marzer (regions). All these materials are available on the National Statistical Service website together with a 10% sample database, the latter allowing for secondary data processing.

Among the 32 census questions, 10 were directly or indirectly related to migration:

- question 2: it allows to classify the population into 1. permanent resident population; 2. temporary resident population and 3. temporary absent population. To determine the two latter populations, a 12-month time division was used. Unfortunately, information is published only on the size and characteristics of the permanent resident population;¹
- questions 3/4/5: they touch on, respectively, duration and reason of temporary presence/absence, country where temporarily absents live;
- question 10/11: it allows to identify migrants according to the “country of birth” and “country of citizenship” criteria. However, no detailed information others than sex and age is currently available;
- questions 14/15/16/17: these four questions concern mobility patterns in a broad sense. They respectively ask “Have you been living in this locality since birth?”; “If starting since 1988

¹ It is worth mentioning as household members absent for more than 12 months were also recorded. In principle, this would allow to detect valuable information on Armenians who left the country in the 1990s, who are still considered as household members. Unfortunately, this information has been not processed, yet.

you have changed your place of residence, indicate if you have been forced to change and if so which country you have left?"; "Which is your previous place of residence?"; "How long have you been continuously living here (since which year)?"'. Unfortunately, little information derived from these questions had been published and the level of data disaggregation by sex, age and socio-economic characteristics is quite unsatisfactory.

This source has many advantages and drawbacks. As for the advantages, it is provided with reliable quantitative and structural data on migrants, meaning the monitoring and evaluation of migration processes in time. Moreover, it is available also for secondary processing. As for the drawbacks, it should be noted that this source contains outdated information, and also that this information is not detailed enough in data processing terms.

1.2. Population Register

The State Population Register was established following the adoption of the relevant RA law in 2002. Currently, it functions as a part of the Passport and Visa Department of the Armenian police and little cooperation is observed between this Department and the authorities of the Armenian National Statistical Institute. Essentially, their interaction is limited to issuing and receiving immigrants' and emigrants' statistical record coupons.

The main limitation of this source is that it only provides for the possibility and for the procedure of registration at a place of permanent residence (de iure population) by excluding the possibility to register at a temporary place of residence (de facto population).² Moreover, the procedure of registration and deregistration is complicated so that migrants rarely inform authorities about any change in their permanent place of residence. This primarily means a significant underestimation in emigration and immigration flows, the latter being mainly composed of return migrants.

Theoretically, the State Population Register should also provide information on the migrant stock at a given point in time. However, taking into account that its establishment has not been completed yet, that the underestimation of migrants is considerable, and that temporary stayers are not recorded, their practical significance is slight.

To summarize, given the limited availability and low reliability of this source, the Population census remains the only source of data on the stock of permanent and temporary migrants living in Armenia.

1.3 Migration records

The State Population Registry and the Passport and Visa Department of the Armenian police are also responsible for managing migration records. Registration is based on the voluntary statements of migrants themselves.

Specifically, according to the mentioned law:

- International immigrants (all individuals who come to Armenia for 6 months or more) declare their arrival in the State Population Register and fill out the statistical record coupon for arrival;
- International emigrants (all persons who want to leave Armenia for 6 months or more) declare their departure in the State Population Register and fill out the statistical record coupon for

² The law requires that everyone shall, within 7 days, inform the authorities about any change in permanent place of residence. The act introduces the following definition of this notion: "The permanent place of residence is regarded as the location where a dweller declares to reside". As such it is not necessary for an individual to really reside there. As regards the temporary criteria of duration to define a permanent place of residence, they are not precisely designated in the RA act on the State Population Register.

departure. Alternatively, they can register in the Armenian Consular Service in the destination country. The Consular Service will then pass the information to the State Population Register via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

- Once a month, the State Population Register passes the statistical record coupons for arrivals and departures to the Armenian National Statistical Service which publishes this information annually.

Statistical record coupons contain the following details: name, surname, date and place of birth, sex, nationality and country of citizenship, place of registration, place of work and profession, unemployment status, education, family status, purpose of movement, sex and age of accompanying children under the age of 16. In addition to the above items, in the statistical record coupons for arrivals there are the following questions: “Where are you from and when did you arrive?”, “Where are you heading?” and “When are you departing?”.

The biggest problem with this source is that it covers only a marginal part of the real arrivals and departures. According to several experts of the National Statistical Service, a second disadvantage is that migrants’ statistical record coupons are not always properly filled out. Indeed, there is often some part of the information missing. Finally and crucially, data from the source is not processed in detail and only aggregated statistics are published. Obviously, the first two disadvantages greatly reduce the practical value of data obtained from this source, On the other hand, data is fully available and, on formal request, it can be processed and provided at a disaggregate level.

1.4 Crossing border records

Records on border crossings are collected by the Border Electronic Management Information System (BEMIS) established within the National Security Service.

Registration is carried out at all border points by passport controllers. By scanning passport data, all persons crossing the border are registered. In the process of this continuous registration of passengers, the following data about each of them is obtained: name and surname, date of birth, sex, country of citizenship, place of permanent residence, date of passport issue, issuing authority and passport number.

Collected information is transmitted to BEMIS. Until 2010, only BEMIS had access and the only data transmitted to a limited number of government departments were monthly totals of arrivals and departures. One of the recipients of this data was the National Statistical Service, which used to publish it in its yearbooks. Since 2010 the situation though has changed. The National Statistical Service, having obtained limited access to the database, has processed and published the data for 2010 with a division between Armenian and foreign citizens.

The disadvantages of this source are self-evident. Its data is inaccessible and there is a lack of detailed processing, and there is also the fact that its data is not necessarily relevant for migration matters. Moreover, data is not classified by purpose of movement and thus it also includes people who move for tourism, visits to friends and relatives, etc.

1.5 Ad hoc surveys

Already since the mid-1990s, when there was a mass outflow of Armenians and yet official data failed to confirm this, sample surveys have been the only source of reliable information on migration. This is particularly true regarding the size of population inflows and outflows. Over the years, a number of sample surveys have dealt with migration issues. They can be grouped as follows:

- Complex migration surveys (covering the full gamut of migration movements);

- Specific migration surveys (dealing only with specific categories, i.e. labor migrants, returnees, etc.);
- Other *ad hoc* surveys which indirectly include migration issues.

Unfortunately, the first two categories do not have a clearly defined periodicity. There is also no institutional body responsible for the collection and dissemination of this data. Every organization and research group tends to act independently. There are also no uniform criteria for determining migrants. In most cases a combination of characteristics, as e.g. the purpose of movement and its estimated duration, was taken into account. In particular, due to the wide prevalence of seasonal labor migration, three months was often taken as the minimal duration.

The scope of migration-related variables varied among surveys. Naturally, in surveys where migration appeared as a secondary topic, there were fewer of them, than in pure migration surveys. In the latter, the main demographic and socio-economic characteristics concerning all respondents, for emigrants and immigrants were gathered. Dates for migration movements during the observation period and the characteristics of the last movement were also obtained: purpose, duration, geography, reasons, labor and earnings, labor and living conditions, problems and ways of solving them, relations with the local community and administrative bodies etc. Additionally, most surveys include questions concerning future migration intentions and plans.

Complex surveys are generally retrospective studies aimed at reconstructing all migration events experienced by the respondents. Random sampling is used in almost all of these surveys so that statistical inference to the whole reference population is allowed. The main merit of these *ad hoc* surveys is the fact that they provide more reliable, comprehensive and more in-depth information about migration processes in Armenia than official sources. The problem with these surveys lies in the fact that, because of differences in methodological approaches, their results are not comparable.