



# The European Union’s “Support to Migration Policy Development and Relevant Capacity Building in Armenia” Programme

Եվրամիության «Աջակցություն Հայաստանում միգրացիոն քաղաքականության և համապատասխան կարողությունների հզորացմանը» ծրագիր

## Policy Brief Համառոտագիր



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Ծրագիրը ֆինանսավորվել է Եվրամիության կողմից



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International Center for Human Development  
Մարդկային զարգացման միջազգային կենտրոն



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ՀՀ տարածքային կառավարման նախարարության միգրացիոն գործակալություն

## **Around its own axis**

The fact that labor migrants leave the country mainly to find a job that matches their skills and is adequately remunerated, as well as in pursuit of a better and more comfortable lifestyle seems irrefutable. Achievements of the developed world hospitably open up a door to new opportunities and capabilities.

Any developing country seems to face not just the challenge of using its internal potential, but also bringing in the external opportunities into the circle of its development. It can be inferred that a big Diaspora and large migration flows should actually trigger the development of our country, contribute to offering new employment opportunities and promote social, economic and public achievements (at least 60,000 migrants from Armenia annually seek jobs abroad). Indeed, migrant remittances have a significant social impact. However this does not result in any way in the development of our economy. Migrants are not necessarily inspired to invest their new skills and earnings into the development of their home country. In the result, remittances are essentially used for consumptions, thus contributing to inflation and appreciation of the Armenian Dram, whereas our citizens abroad who have gained new professional and technical knowledge and skills seek to change their status from a labor migrant to a local citizen, thus expanding the modern Diaspora.

## **Returning to uncertainty**

The important question is: what are the major incentives for migrants to return home? The fact that 81% of migrants having left Armenia from 2002-2007 have returned to Armenia at least once and that 23% of the returnees do not plan to leave the country at least in 2008 prompts that notwithstanding the social issues, migrants are still willing to return. A number of research show that the main reason for return is the reunification with the family. Another incentive for returning is the possibility of finding a job in Armenia or losing the job in the destination country. Oftentimes, the reason is migrants' inflexibility to adjust to the social values and lifestyles in foreign cultures. Though the majority of returnees appreciate the migration experience in terms of gaining new knowledge and skills, the impact of new qualifications is rather ambivalent on their competitiveness in the Armenian market. Moreover, investment of the returnees in creating new employment opportunities, developing the business and sharing new skills and technologies are yet quite limited. What are the reasons to account for these phenomena?

Research findings show that

- the qualified labor force is needed in sectors such as construction and information technologies;
- in service, trade and financial sectors there is a need for so-called 'new' professions, i. e. market research, advertisement, etc.

- vacancy announcements mostly profile low qualifications and respectively state small remunerations, whereas the few jobs requiring higher qualifications are usually not being sufficiently supplied by adequate workforce.

We continue creating the future of our country in spheres where demand is lacking: we educate ‘qualified’ professionals in ‘respectable’ sectors – law, economics, etc. – forgetting that what we really need is construction workers, architects, engineers. In fact, we prefer to be an unemployed economist and doctor, rather than an employed, highly qualified construction worker.

In addition, we need to confess that the list of professions being provided by educational institutions and distribution of graduates in the employment market is not sufficiently grounded, since in reality this list does not meet the real demands of the market, but instead addresses the ‘state budget financing’ and ‘demand of the local education market’, which ensure direct inflow of financial resources.

**“I won’t drive and that’s it! For the sake of our farm, I refuse to drive.”<sup>1</sup>**

Thus, what are the actions that will allow turning migration into a development factor for the country?

Obviously, it is necessary to harmonize the legislation regulating migration, education, economy and labor and consider the relevant needs and issues. For instance, the list of professions being provided at post-secondary level should be well-grounded and based on flexible standards that reflect the real needs of the Armenian economy. This is indeed an ambitious recommendation. However, we are certain that the existing resources are enough to address these issues if a realistic policy is developed. For example, instead of promulgating the Bologna Process and flooding the public with further promises and plans of harmonization with the European standards of higher education it is necessary to actually implement what we really need. It is high time we educate our youth with the spirit of being useful, rather than with aspiration for a diploma from a ‘prestigious program’.

The time is ripe to work out a realistic policy or perhaps another mechanism to foster the return of qualified work force, exchange of new knowledge, skills and technologies, investments and new jobs. Finally, it is already an imperative to develop an environment of business, legal and social justice in the country in order to reduce the pace of development of modern Diaspora and to ensure the return of migrants home.

*This paper has been developed based on the opinions passed by the participants of a round table organized within the framework of the project "Support to Migration Policy Development and Relevant Capacity Building in Armenia". The event took place on October 14, 2008. The roundtable was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The project is financed by the European Union.*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a famous quote from an Armenian movie “Golden Heifer”, the main message of which stresses the value of individual commitment to the collective good.