



# 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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Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of RA  
ՀՀ տարածքային կառավարման նախարարության միգրացիոն գործակալություն

# Challenges of migration management policies: a backward looking glance from the future



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Experts vary in their perspectives regarding the state policy on migration. Some believe that the current policy is quite liberal, thus being pregnant with significant threats to the national security and state interests. Some others think that the current system does not ensure the RA citizens' right to free movement, that it actually hinders the implementation of the internationally adopted norms both on providing shelter for humanitarian purposes and on protection of human rights and that it does not contribute to the process of making the country more attractive for organizing and providing business, education, health and other services. What it actually does is considerably slow down the process of harmonization of the migration policy with the international norms.

Yet another group of experts think that the current liberal policy does not actually have any other alternative: first, because the inventory of officially regulating emigration is extremely limited, and second, because regulating immigration more strictly is simply unnecessary, as the number of immigrating foreigners is a tiny drop within the overall migration flows. Still, almost all of them share the opinion that Armenia needs such a system and policy on migration regulation that will diminish the current negative impact of the migration processes and instead, will direct these processes towards the development of the Armenian society.

## **The perils of a temporary cease-fire**

Given the various approaches and perspectives regarding the migration system and its regulation, at present all the agencies carrying responsibilities in the field of migration have registered a fragile consensus, in the framework of which it will be extremely difficult to work out and develop a unified strategy for the long-term development of the system. Therefore, there is a tangible risk that the institutional and legal reforms will be carried out through momentary and situational decisions, which in case of even the slightest change of conditions will be subject to review and revision. Moreover, different approaches of the agencies responsible for the various parts of the same process jeopardize the development and implementation of a holistic and purposeful policy. In the result, we will end up with faulty regulation practices, vagueness of rights and responsibilities and institutional conundrum.

## **A political umbrella for a policy**

Whether a centralized model of state regulation of migrations processes is chosen, which is governed from a common centre, or a decentralized one, where there is a clear distribution of responsibilities, first and foremost, it is necessary to clarify the strategic direction of the political and institutional development policy, excluding misinterpretations within the system of state regulation and ensuring that the society clearly perceives this strategy. Such a policy should necessarily be anchored on the political benchmarks having been adopted by the RA political leadership, and the relevant targets.

## **The programme of the political leader as a beacon**

While defining the vision for the political development of the country, the election programme of the RA President admits that the geopolitical situation and the active processes of integration make the development of an effective security system a necessity, a system that is based on the priority of protecting the political, economic and other interests of the country and the society. The regulation of migration which essentially is also a relevant instrument of national security should provide a foundation for the proportional development of the country, as well as serve as a tool towards the vision of turning Armenia into a center of adequate services in sectors such as business, regional finances, education, health and tourism.

## **On the track of the political decision on European integration**

The RA government has promulgated European integration as a development priority. EU-Armenia cooperation within the framework of the ENP Eastern Partnership Programme has stepped into a qualitatively new phase. The Council of Ministers has decided to start negotiations regarding the

19 Sayat Nova  
Yerevan 0001  
Armenia

Tel.: +374 10 582638  
Fax: +374 10 527082

mail@ichd.org  
www.ichd.org

membership of the South Caucasian countries, including Armenia. In turn, Armenia has committed to develop cooperation with the EU regarding migration issues and this commitment is reflected in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and balanced National Action Programme regarding migration and shelter issues; the guarantee for realization of the right to free movement; modernization of the RA system of statistical services in accordance with the EU standards, including statistical data on migration, systems of data collection and exchange; initiation of an effective dialog regarding the issue of readmission; support to the re-integration of the RA citizens; systematized fight against trafficking; development of the capacities of the state agencies dealing with migration issues; promotion of participation of young people in international study programmes and in other relevant means.

### **On the track of political commitments of the government**

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The RA government has assured that the balanced regional development and active demographic policy are among its top priorities and has committed to direct state policies towards preventing emigration of the population from communities in regions of high altitudes and at the borders of the country, and emigration in general, as well as encouraging immigration. The government is responsible for continuing the process of integration of refugees from Azerbaijan in 1988-1992 with the Armenian society; for completing the process of creating a unified system of comprehensive and detailed registration of data on population mobility, as well as for promoting a civilized integration of the Republic of Armenia into the international job market. Issues such as legislative regulation of labor migration and the state protection of the rights and legal interests of labor migrants will also be the focus of the government policies. The system of providing protection by the Republic of Armenia to foreign citizens and individuals without citizenship based on humanitarian principles should be harmonized with the international standards. Processes such as entry of the foreign citizens, provision of residence in the RA and their registration should also be reformed. New structures regulating their job activities in Armenia will be introduced. The government will also focus on the improvement of the border management system and the legal regulation of relations emerging during the RA citizens' entry and exit. The government will also introduce passports containing biometric data.

### **On the track of national security priorities**

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Effective governance, specifically prevention of irregular migration, has been recognized as a target for the RA strategy for national security. The latter ratifies that the Republic of Armenia will participate in international programmes and activities of reputable organizations regarding migration, as well as integration processes in this field both in Europe and the former Soviet area.

### **Demonstration of political will: the beginning of a new process**

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It seems that the prospect is already outlined and the directions are marked. In order to juxtapose those and weigh the priorities it is necessary to have political will. That this will exists is verified by the facts that a working group adjacent to the RA National Security Council has been created, which is working out migration reforms, and relevant responsibilities have been defined. Actually the first step should be the definition of realistic and attainable targets, for instance, start the process of liberalization visa regime for Europe within a clear timeframe; develop and introduce a unified system for collection and analysis of data regarding migration, which is compatible with international standards; harmonize the systems of the RA entry visa and residence, by equally liberalizing the system and regulating the process of border crossing, in order for Armenian citizens to fully exercise their rights and for the partner countries not to perceive Armenia as an export and transit country for irregular migration. In economic development strategies migration processes should be considered as developmental resources. This list can be continued. Eventually, an objective assessment of the effectiveness of a migration policy includes the positive shift in the migration balance, which means that our fellow citizens vote for Armenia not simply with their hearts, but 'feet' as well: they actually move into the country, and the increased interest of foreigners towards the country.

*This paper has been developed based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion organized within the framework of the project "Support to Migration Policy Development and Relevant Capacity Building in Armenia". The event took place on December 22, 2009. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.*

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