



National Voluntary Review

Republic of Armenia

1. Introduction and Methodology

The Republic of Armenia was among the 152 Member States to vote in favour of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration at the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018. The Republic of Armenia welcomed the GCM's comprehensive approach to the governance of migration and accordingly is fully participating in the first voluntary review of GCM implementation since its endorsement.

The Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (from now on referred to as the Migration Service), as the primary body responsible for migration policy development, was responsible for the implementation of the National Voluntary Review. The Migration Service was in turn supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Mission in Armenia who appointed an international consultant to implement the National Voluntary Review. The review was implemented between 27 July 2020 and 25 August 2020.

Owing to the Covid-19 situation, the review was prepared through online consultations and desk-based research. The review included consulting the reports of government and non-governmental stakeholders of relevance to achieving the GCM objectives. Different stakeholders including different government actors and structures, including at the local level, and non-governmental actors were consulted with respect to developments in the policy and practices of the Government of the Republic of Armenia as they relate to the 23 objectives outlined in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). To ensure a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the Voluntary National Review, following the vision and guiding principles of the GCM (paras 8 to 15), the following actors were consulted:

- The Migration Service (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure)
- The State Employment Agency (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)
- The Advisor to the Governor of Tavush Province of Armenia
- Caritas Armenia
- Repat Armenia Foundation

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Mission in Armenia
- The United Nations United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) office in Yerevan
- Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of the Prime Minister's Office of the Republic of Armenia.

In future reviews, a more extensive list of stakeholders may be involved in the review process through the organization of roundtable discussions on different aspects of GCM implementation. The review focused primarily on policy developments since the adoption of the GCM in 2018, although changes arising since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were also considered. In the absence of an existing review of the Republic of Armenia's policies as related to the GCM, the review establishes baselines which can be used to measure progress in future voluntary reviews.

The National Voluntary Review for the Republic of Armenia has been structured following the guidelines provided by the United Nations Economic Commissioner for Europe (UNECE). A more extensive review was prepared for the United Nations Economic Commissioner for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) ahead of the 'Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration' on 18-20 November 2020. Accordingly, this report synthesises the results of the ESCAP review.

2. Policy and Enabling Environment

In December 2018, following the Velvet revolution in Spring 2018, Nikol Pashinyan became the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, winning 70.4 per cent of the votes in a snap election¹. Since the inauguration of the new Government in the Republic of Armenia, several policy and institutional changes have had, mostly positive, implications, for migration governance. Observers have noted a positive shift with respect to the openness of dialogue between the government and other stakeholders which support the GCM principle of a whole-of-society approach.

The main Government body in charge of migration-related policy in the Republic of Armenia is the Migration Service of Armenia, currently operating within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures. The mandate of the Migration Service has expanded over time, and, under planned government reforms, will become part of the new Ministry of Interior in 2021. The Ministry of Diaspora was replaced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs in 2019. Many other agencies are also involved in migration-related issues

¹ World Bank (2019) Country Economic Update, Winter 2019: A Strong Mandate for Change amid a Global Slowdown World Bank Group, Washington D.C.

such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Consular Department; The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, particularly the State Employment Service Agency; National Security Service (NSS), particularly the Border Guard troops; the Police; Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Health, and others. Coordination between these various agencies continues to be a challenge in policy development and implementation.

Since 2000, the Republic of Armenia, migration policy and practice has been guided by a National Concept for State Regulation of Migration. The migration concept was revised in 2004 and again in 2010². One of the key changes in the 2010 migration concept compared to the 2000/2004 concepts was the inclusion of return and readmission. Where the earlier Concept had focused on emigration, owing to high levels of emigration from the Republic of Armenia in the post-Soviet period in the 1990s, by 2010, the focus had shifted to repatriation. With the changing migration dynamics in the country, the forthcoming migration concept, under development at time of writing, devotes attention to immigration as well as to the linkages between migration and development:

‘The new concept of state migration management in Armenia is designed to support achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as well as accelerate implementation of the commitments under Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Global Compact on Refugees, 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.’³

In recent years, the further development of migration policy in the Republic of Armenia has been highly prioritised by the Government as reflected in the 2020-2050 Armenia Transformation Strategy; the National Security Strategy of Armenia; the 2019 Programme of the Government⁴; the current draft of a new National Concept for State Regulation of Migration; and the elaboration of several new strategies of relevance to the development of migration policy such as the 2021-2031 strategy of the migration policy of the Republic of Armenia on the regulation of integration and reintegration issues. For the first time, the Government of the Republic of Armenia’s Programme 2019 contains a dedicated chapter on migration (Chapter 6.7). Like the previous Government Programme 2017-2021⁵ (Chapter 2.2), the 2019 Programme also contained a chapter on relations with the Armenian diaspora (Chapter 2.4) and contains several references to migration throughout the programme.

The main objective of migration policy, according to the 2019 programme is ‘to ensure the free and safe movement of people by bringing it into balance with the national security of the country’ (p65). The programme ‘underlines the importance of directing the economic and human potential of the migrants, including the returning migrants, to the development of the

² “Concept Paper on the Policy for the State Regulation of Migration in the Republic of Armenia” adopted by the Republic of Armenia Government Protocol Decision N51 on 30 December 2010

³ Concept of the State Migration Management, Draft 12 February 2020

⁴ Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 65-A of 8 February 2019 on the ‘Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia’

⁵ Program of the Government of the Republic of Armenia 2017-2022, Annex to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 646-A of 19 June 2017

country’ (p65). In the area of diaspora policy, the Government ‘attaches importance to the full-fledged involvement of the potential of the Diaspora in the development of Armenia’ (p20) and outlines plans to promote repatriation and to support reintegration but also to strengthen links with its diaspora communities abroad and to strengthen a pan-Armenian identity. Other references to migration include references to student mobility and the internationalization of education; the fight against trafficking in human beings including through the development of the countries border check-points; protecting the rights of Armenians living abroad; addressing discrimination; visa liberalization; and double taxation agreements.

At the regional level, the Republic of Armenia has been part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) since 2015. The EEU allows the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour between its Member States⁶. Given the scale of labour migration from the Republic of Armenia to the Russian Federation, in particular, membership in the EEU has facilitated the easier movement of labour migration from the Republic of Armenia. Migration to the Russian Federation has substantially increased as a result of Armenia’s accession to the EEU, rising from 123,228 in 2013 to 210,460 in 2019⁷. One possible reason for the increase is that Armenians in the Russian Federation regularised their status, significantly reducing the informal economy⁸. However, one area of concern is the protection of the rights of workers in the Russian Federation, which is currently an area that is being addressed by NGOs. The Joint Armenian-Russian Working Group, which has been in existence since 2010, meets annually to discuss exchange information and discuss common concerns related to migration.

The Republic of Armenia also has close relations with the European Union (EU). The Republic of Armenia signed a Mobility Partnership with the EU in 2011. The Visa Facilitation Agreement was signed in December 2012 and a Readmission Agreement in 2013, both of which came into force in January 2014. While discussions with the EU on an Associated Agreement were temporarily placed on hold after four years of negotiations while the Republic of Armenia discussed its membership of the EEU, the Republic of Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU in 2017 which was ratified by Armenia in 2018. At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels 2018, EU leaders pledged to start a visa liberalization dialogue (VLD) with Armenia, but an official announcement of a VLD is still to come. Visa liberalisation with the EU is a priority for Armenia, as stated in the 2019 Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia⁹. Visa liberalisation would go a long way to promoting the implementation of the GCM since, ‘the best way to tackle irregular migration is by providing legal pathways for safe, regular and orderly migration.’¹⁰

⁶ Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation

⁷ Chobanyan, H. (2020) Armenia’s Migration cooperation with the European Union and Eurasian Economic Union, Prague Process Policy Brief, June 2020.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ‘The implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement is considered a significant factor promoting the agenda of reforms of the Government for the development of Armenia. The Government will continue to take steps for ensuring the EU visa liberalisation for the citizens of the Republic of Armenia’ (p18)

¹⁰ Ibid. p8.

Accordingly, the Government has been taking steps to ensure that Armenia fulfils the conditions required to initiate the process, such as the reduction of irregular migration and cooperating with readmission requests. Among other initiatives, the Government has worked together with civil society partners and the international community to implement information campaigns to discourage irregular migration. The change of Government in 2018 has also had a positive effect on emigration trends, with the country seeing a positive net migration rate for the first time in over a decade in 2019. Coupled with EU MS efforts to expedite asylum claims from Armenian nationals, the number of first-time applicants across EU MS has decreased from 6,875 in 2017 to 4,855 in 2018 and 3,525 in 2019¹¹. Furthermore, in 2019 and 2020, the Government has sent official delegations, comprising of members of the Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Migration Service to key Member States of the EU¹² to negotiate ways of facilitating the launch of the VLD. The Head of the Migration Service led the most recent visits. A self-assessment report on the VLD preparations is currently being prepared. It is hoped that the excellent cooperation of the Government in the area of return and readmission, as well as other areas such as border management, will be conducive to the EU agreeing to launch a VLD soon.

3. Progress on GCM objectives

The Government of the Republic of Armenia views the GCM as a comprehensive approach to the governance of migration and, as such, has not conducted any specific exercises to identify priority indicators or to develop an implementation plan. Nevertheless, the principles and objectives of the GCM are well integrated into Armenia's policy and practice (Annex 1). A child-sensitive and gender-responsive approach is particularly well integrated into the strategy on integration and reintegration¹³ (Annex 2). Owing to the migration context in the country, however, some objectives have been naturally prioritised (see Annex 3). The remainder of this section highlights some key development as they relate to the various objectives of the GCM.

Data and Evidence (Objective 1 and 7)

The Republic of Armenia has been working on improving its migration data capacities for a long time. In 2019, the first Extended Migration Profile for the Republic of Armenia (2013-2017) was published¹⁴. The Migration Service prepared the report with the support of ICMPD and in cooperation with different government agencies (including the Police, Statistical

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, France, Spain, Sweden, and Finland

¹³ Furthermore, gender is taken into consideration in the 2019-2021 National Action Plan of the Republic of Armenia on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and Timetable for its Implementation.

¹⁴ Migration Service of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures (2019) Republic of Armenia: Extended Migration Profile 2013-2017, prepared in accordance with Point 4 of the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 44 of 19 October 2017

Committee, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Central Bank), international organizations and independent experts. The Migration Service plans to release an Extended Migration Profile every three years and statistical reports every year. The 2018 Statistical report is due to be published by the end of 2020.

Significant efforts have also been made to develop indicators to measure the migration and development-related commitments in the SDGs. A process of nationalizing the SDGs in the field of Migration and Development began in 2016. A multi-stakeholder workshop was organized, which brought together over 60 participants from different government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, academic and the media. Although not yet approved and adopted by the Government, the process identified five priority targets and proxy indicators were developed¹⁵. The UN has since established the SDG Task Force with the participation of ArmStat and the Prime Minister's Office. One of the concrete outcomes of these meetings has been the development of a National SDG Reporting Platform using the 'Open SDG' Platform. The Alpha version of the website is live and can be accessed through the ArmStat website¹⁶. ArmStat has received technological and technical support from IOM and UNFPA in establishing the Platform. Data for two of the four indicators under SDG Target 10.7¹⁷ are currently available; namely, the 'percentage of returned migrants who undertook paid work during the last 7 days' (10.7.2.a) and the 'proportion of individual asylum applications granted' (10.7.2.b). Data sources for the 'recruitment cost borne by employees as a proportion of yearly income earned in country of destination' (10.7.1.) and the 'number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies' (10.7.2) are still being explored. Data sources are being explored for other indicators of relevance to migration¹⁸.

Clear Procedures, Decent Work, and Better Data (Objectives 1, 5, 6 and 12)

While the State Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has issued work permits since 2018, a Government Decree¹⁹ issued in April 2020 will see this responsibility transferred to the Migration Service and the development of a new system to manage the issuance of work permits. The Work Permit system seeks to establish a transparent process for immigrants seeking to live and work in the Republic of Armenia. The system will enhance interagency cooperation and migration data through the integration of different databases (Figure 1). Once operational, data on the number of permits granted disaggregated

¹⁵ SDG Implementation Voluntary National Review (VNR) Armenia 2018: Report for the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, p21

¹⁶ <https://sdg.armstat.am/>

¹⁷ 'Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies'

¹⁸ Including Target 8.8 (labour rights), Target 10.c (remittances), Target 16.2 (human trafficking), and Target 4b (scholarships).

¹⁹ Decree of the Government of the Republic of Armenia # 670-L of 30 April, 2020 On Approving the Program for the Introduction of an Electronic Management System to Issue Foreign Nationals Work Permits and Register Employment Contracts Concluded With Foreign Nationals

by sex, age, country of citizenship, and permit duration will be extractable. The system is scheduled to be live by 1 January 2021.

Figure 1: Electronic Management System



Trafficking (Objective 10)

Despite significant efforts to tackle trafficking since the early 2000s, recent years have seen the Government of Armenia being downgraded in the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIPS) report, from Tier 1 in 2017 to 2 in 2018 and the Tier 2 Watch List in 2020. The primary reason for this is that the mandate of coordinating the Inter-Agency Working Group against Trafficking in Persons (IWGTP) was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In June 2019, amendments and supplements were made to the Law ‘On identification of and support to victims of trafficking in human beings and exploitation’. New measures include financial support to child victims of trafficking; a procedure for sharing information about victims of trafficking and exploitation; and a new referral mechanism. Furthermore, two State programmes have been established: the State Programme for Social-

Psychological Rehabilitation Services for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation, Women and Girls Subjected to Sexual Exploitation and the State Programme for Lump-Sum Monetary Compensation for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation²⁰. The programmes provide victims of trafficking and exploitation with long-term assistance to prevent revictimization (such as legal support, shelter, access to state healthcare, education and other social services) and financial support. A National Action Plan for 2019-2021 on the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation has been drafted and adopted as of 4 June 2020 by Government decree No 909-L²¹.

Border Management (Objective 11)

In recent years, the Government has undertaken a process of modernizing the country's border crossing points. The three border crossing border points with Georgia in the North of the country have been modernized funded by a loan from the European Investment Bank and supplemented by a grant from the European Union, and government funds and overseen by UNDP. The upgrades have included the simplification of procedures, upgrading of infrastructure and equipment, improved security and capacity building. Similar work is now underway, with the support of UNDP and ICMPD on the modernization of the border crossing point in Meghri on the Southern border of the Republic of Armenia with Iran. The 2019 Government Program outlines plans to develop border check-points further for, among other goals, the fight against trafficking and the exploitation of human beings and the UNDAF (2016-2020) outlines how the UN will support in the further development of Integrated Border Management in the country. Work is also underway to further clarify procedures, since, at present, two different authorities can issue visas (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Policy). Streamlining these processes will further increase the efficiency of border management processes.

The construction of a new temporary accommodation centre for up to 100 asylum seekers is planned for 2021 (as per Clause 232.3 of the Program "Measures to Ensure the Implementation of the Government's 2019-2023 Activity Plan"). The detailed design package of the new centre was prepared with support from ICMPD Armenia and is expected to comply with international standards.

Return, Readmission and Reintegration (Objective 21)

The Government has prioritised the area of return, readmission and reintegration. Several relevant developments include:

²⁰ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21 (A/HRC/WG.6/35/ARM/1)

²¹ https://www.e-gov.am/u_files/file/decrees/kar/2020/06/909-%D4%BC.pdf

- Readmission agreements have been signed with the EU and the Russia Federation which are reported to be functioning well. Agreements with Moldova and Ukraine have been negotiation and are awaiting signature. Negotiations are underway with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus. Implementation protocols have been signed with France and the Benelux countries.
- Since February 2018, the Migration Service runs a ‘One Window’ Reintegration Service. It will shortly launch an online information system (#backtoarmenia) for citizens (as well as dual citizens) who intend to return to the Republic of Armenia.
- In 2019, the Department of Return and Reintegration was established in the Migration Service.
- In collaboration with IOM (others), the Government has released the third edition²² of its Guide for Reintegration of Returnees in Armenia.
- A ‘State Primary Assistance Program for Reintegration of Returned (including Compulsory Returned) Citizens to the Republic of Armenia²³,’ was adopted in March 2020. The programme includes a housing subsidy (60,000AMD) for six months as well as information and referral support and is targeted at Armenian citizens who have lived in another country for more than 12 months and who have returned through a readmission agreement or have been deported. Special provisions are defined in the programme for unaccompanied minors, the elderly, and adults with disabilities.
- Since 2019, the Government supported by the IOM has been undertaking significant efforts to set up an effective, migrant centred system for safe and dignified return of migrants from Armenia.

(Re) Integration (Objectives 16, 19 and 21)

Recent years have seen increasing immigration to the Republic of Armenia. Accordingly, the Government began the process of elaborating an integration policy in 2016²⁴ and a plan of action for its implementation. In 2019, responding to the increased immigration of foreign citizens, who had not been included in the 2016 policy, the government initiated the drafting of the ‘2021-2031 Strategy of the Migration Policy of the Republic of Armenia on Regulation of Integration and Reintegration Issues’. The strategy has been drafted by an Interagency Working Group, headed by the Migration Service. The strategy outlines many goals, including reforms in the institutional framework for integration and reintegration as well as capacity building and competence development for staff involved in the process. The strategy also outlines goals relating to shelter and living conditions, rights and social assistance, access to health care and education, economic inclusion, cultural integration and reintegration, and

²² The first edition was produced in 2013 and updated based on legal and institutional changes in 2016.

²³ Approved by the Decision N 336-L of 19 March, 2020 of the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

²⁴ Government Protocol Decree No. 28 on 21 July 2016 ‘The conceptual framework for the integration policy of individuals recognized as refugees and granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia, as well as of long-term migrants’

cultivating an accepting environment. The strategy is well aligned with the guiding principles of the GCM (Annex 3).

From 2018, Caritas Armenia has been implementing the project ‘Increased resilience of Syrian Armenians and host population’ supported by the European Union Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the Austrian Development Cooperation and the Austrian Red Cross. A significant component of the project is to support the establishment of a business. The incubator will support Syrian repatriates, locals, refugees and asylum seekers in business creation from providing advice and support on the initial idea and creation of a business plan, through to business establishment.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many labour migrants have either returned to or not departed from Armenia. On the one hand, this poses a challenge concerning already high levels of unemployment, but it also increases the salience of reintegration programmes. IOM at the request and with close cooperation with Tavush Governor’s Administration has initiated a pilot, aiming to boost local development through return and reintegration of migrants to Tavush. The main target group is Armenian migrants, including labour migrants, residing mainly in Russian and other countries.

Diaspora (Objective 19)

The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs is currently engaged in several relevant initiatives. At the time of writing, a Law on Repatriation, which will provide a clear definition of a repatriate is under development supported by a multi-stakeholder Working Group and is due to enter parliament in Fall 2020. The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs has recently launched the ‘iGorts’ programme, which will bring up to 100 diaspora Armenian professionals to lend their experience and knowledge towards improving and developing state institutions, policies, and programs for 12 months. Initially designed for 20 participants, immense interest (more than 800 applications) led the Office, with the support of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to expand the scope of the programme. Two hundred online interviews have been conducted by the Office, along with 22 other ministries and state agencies. The programme has been significantly delayed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic but is due to begin in September 2020. The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs is currently working to establish a ‘Repatriation and Integration Centre’ (working title) scheduled to be launched at the end of 2020. The centre will serve as a one-stop-shop for (potential) repatriates²⁵. Resources permitting, each repatriate will be assigned to

²⁵ Areas of the Repatriation and Integration Centre’s expertise will include but not be limited to: the acquisition of visas, residency permits, and citizenship; how to import personal items to the country; registering an address; obtaining social security card; assistance in purchasing or renting property and managing utilities; setting up bank accounts; obtaining a new driver’s license; resources to facilitate finding employment; pensions and retirement planning; guidance regarding childcare, schooling, and continuing education; introduction to the healthcare system, insurance, and suggestions of reputable doctors and clinics; organizing Eastern Armenian language classes if needed/desired; assistance in registering a new/existing business; paying taxes; introduction to general laws/policies/the legal system; etc.

an ‘integration support specialist’. Centre representatives will be available via toll-free numbers in countries with a significant diaspora population, via email and a web application, and will offer assistance in all dominant languages in the diaspora²⁶. In-country support will be provided at an office in Yerevan, and potentially in other regions in the future.

Information (Objective 3 and 7)

There are currently seven Migration Resource Centre (MRC) in the Republic managed by the State Employment Agency under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs²⁷. Plans are underway to open two new centres in Shirak and Lori. While the MRCs have been functioning for many years, efforts have been made to increase their effectiveness and reach. In cooperation with IOM, the State Employment Agency has established a Mobile MRC which travels around the country to organize meetings in communities. The impact of the Mobile MRC is, however, limited by resources. Next to information dissemination, the centres also collect data on common challenges faced by Armenian citizens abroad. For example, an issue with double transaction costs highlighted by migrants to the Russian Federation highlighted has been addressed through the provision of banking facilities that can be used in both countries without additional fees. To further enhance information dissemination, iMigrant was announced in 2018. Initially a three-part project, the first pillar (information) has been fast-tracked owing to the COVID-19 situation, with two other pillars (e-governance and business initiatives) temporarily placed on hold. The system has been useful in identifying people and informing them about COVID-19 related initiatives.

4. Means of implementation

The Government of the Republic of Armenia values its partnerships with international organizations and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of its migration-related policies, and these will continue to be important in the future. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Republic of Armenia 2016-2020 prioritises several areas of relevance to the implementation of the objectives of the GCM. Notably, the UNDAF establishes the following objective:

‘By 2020, migration, border, and asylum management systems are strengthened to promote and protect the rights of migrants and displaced people, especially women and girls²⁸’

²⁶ Including Eastern and Western Armenian, English, Russian, French, Arabic, and Spanish

²⁷ IOM (2016) Managing the Pre-Departure Orientation Process for Armenian Labour Migrants: Country-specific assessment to identify gaps and assess migrant-orientation needs prior to departure, IOM Yerevan

²⁸ Armenia-United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2016-2020, Yerevan 31 Jul 2015

The UNDAF also establishes the provision of reintegration support to returning migrants, particularly in the areas of employment, business development, access to finance and remittances, as a major focus for UN programmes in the country. Resource allocation and project development should align with these goals and support the integration of the priorities and objectives established by the current policy framework in order to further the implementation of the GCM in the country. Starting the Visa Facilitation Dialogue with the EU would go a long way to promoting the implementation of the GCM since ‘the best way to tackle irregular migration is by providing legal pathways for safe, regular and orderly migration²⁹’.

The upcoming institutional reforms whereby the Migration Service will become one arm of the new Ministry of Interior will also require significant resources. With the new functions that the Migration Service is receiving, such as those related to the issuance of Work Permits, training and capacity building for new and existing staff will be required, in addition to technological needs. Resources are required to ensure the sustainability of existing projects, programmes and initiatives. For example, the ‘State Primary Assistance Program for Reintegration of Returned (including Compulsory Returned) Citizens to the Republic of Armenia’ is currently budgeted to provide support to 28 participants. CSOs welcome the fact that the Government is providing such support and would like to see its provisions expanded, given the capacity of the Migration Service is enhanced to allow it to do so. The same is true concerning the retention of diaspora professionals after their 12 months in the iGorts programme.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents immense challenges to countries around the world; however, it also presents some opportunities. The Government of the Republic of Armenia has been interested in attracting its migrants back to the country, in part to address the countries demographic challenges. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrants have been forced to return. As a result, many projects are being fast-tracked, reoriented, and new ideas are being tested. For example, the Government in the Republic of Armenia has expedited many renovation projects planned in the country to ensure the employment of individuals, mainly seasonal migrants who have worked in the construction industry in the Russian. Next to providing migrants who have returned owing to the COVID-19 pandemic with employment, this step also serves to broadly improve the infrastructure of the country, which may have other positive long-term benefits. Ensuring that funds are in place to monitor and evaluate these initiatives, and to roll-out practices that are working will require technical and financial support.

²⁹ Ibid. p8.

5. Next steps

All policy documents and strategies are aimed towards the implementation of the GCM. While there has been no specific implementation plan developed for the GCM, therefore, its principles and objectives are well integrated into Armenia's policy and practice, and this will continue in the future. Accordingly, as the report has highlighted, several developments will be implemented in the coming months and years will further contribute to implementing the principles and objectives of the GCM in the Republic of Armenia. Institutionally, the integration of the Migration Service as one arm of the new Ministry of Interior will further strengthen the Migration Service.

The Government will continue its efforts to improve coordination between various government agencies and to engage with relevant non-government actors in policy formulation and implementation, and to improve migration-related data in support of evidence-based policy. It will continue to proactively communicate updates about migration-related policy changes, including the results of this first National Voluntary Review via various online platforms including its social media pages, and on the forthcoming '#backtoarmenia' website.

The Government of the Republic of Armenia will also continue to actively participate in relevant activities as they relate to the implementation of the GCM. The Government has already been involved in preparatory meetings and will actively participate in the upcoming meeting for the 'Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration' on 18-20 November 2020. Additionally, the Government will participate in the regional meeting under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe scheduled in October 2020. The Government is already to engage in the International Migration Review Forum in 2022, and any other further national review exercises.

Annex 1 Assessing Migration Policy against the Guiding Principles and Objectives of the GCM

Table 1 Assessing Migration Policy using the Guiding Principles of the GCM

Guiding principle	Principle integrated	Explanation
People-centred	Yes	The Migration Concept focuses on migrants as individuals. While not explicitly stated, the Migration Concept follows a people-centred approach because of its focus on the rights and needs of migrants, while balancing these with the national security interest. Furthermore, one of the fundamental principles underpinning the Integration and Reintegration Strategy is a “personalized approach”.
International cooperation	Yes	Strengthening international (and domestic) cooperation is Goal 8 of 9 in the Migration Concept. This includes cooperation at the bilateral, regional and global level, particularly with countries that are either the destination for, or origin of migrants. The Government of the Republic of Armenia also works closely with international organizations and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of its migration-related policies. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Republic of Armenia 2016-2020 prioritises several areas of relevance to the implementation of the objectives of the GCM.
National sovereignty	Yes	The overall objective of migration policy, as outlined in the Government of the Republic of Armenia’s 2019 programme ³⁰ is “to ensure the free and safe movement of people by bringing it into balance with the national security of the country” (p65). National security is one of the five priorities in the draft Migration Concept.
Rule of law and due process	Yes	Importance is accorded to this principle in the management of irregular migration cases, in the improvement of border referral procedures, improvement of identification of persons seeking international protection in different migration flows and referral procedures and in the expulsion process including detention, and return processes.
Sustainable development	Yes	The 2019 Government Programme ‘underlines the importance of directing the economic and human potential of the migrants, including the returning migrants, to the development of the country’ (p65). The Migration Concept has been designed to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 6 of 9 is to increase the impact of migration on sustainable development in Armenia. Objectives include measures to address brain drain, to promote well-being by improving access to health care, include psychological support, set up mechanism to engage the diaspora in different spheres and direct FDI to human and community development projects through, among other interventions, improving financial inclusion.
Human rights	Yes	The ‘human rights and dignity of all groups of migrant workers’ is one of the six priorities identified in the Draft Migration Concept. The Concept acknowledges gaps in the protection of the rights and interests of migrants but establishes the goals of 1) better protecting the rights of migrants abroad; 2) better protecting the rights of immigrants in Armenia; 3) in the area of displacement, the law is well defined, but further enhancing the protection system. The Concept also acknowledges the importance of a rights-based approach to tackling irregular migration, particularly in the context of detention and expulsion.
Gender-responsive	Yes	There is no mention of gender in the Migration Concept. However, as was discussed in the context of Question 3 (Table 2), a child-sensitive and gender-responsive

³⁰ Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 65-A of 8 February 2019 on the ‘Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia’

Guiding principle	Principle integrated	Explanation
		approach is well integrated into the strategy on integration and reintegration. The personalized approach acknowledges variations in integration and reintegration needs in part, determined by sex. The strategy identifies the needs for gender and age-sensitive methods to assess needs. Different categories, including LGBT persons, are mentioned throughout the strategy. Gender is also taken into consideration in the 2019-2021 National Action Plan of the Republic of Armenia on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and Timetable for its Implementation.
Child-sensitive	Yes	The migration concept establishes the objective of improving border referrals and identifies unaccompanied minors as a target group. A child-sensitive approach is also well integrated into the strategy on integration and reintegration. The strategy mentions child(ren) on a number of occasions including references to childcare, ensuring access to education, monitoring performance in education, tailored education programmes and addressing violence against children. Children, along with women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and families, are identified as targets of specific measures. The strategy identifies the needs for gender and age-sensitive methods to assess needs.
Whole-of-government approach	Yes	Strengthening domestic cooperation is reflected in Goal 8 of 9 of the draft Migration Concept. This includes the objective of strengthening cooperation between government agencies through information sharing, the establishment of a system for migration crisis management, and the linkages between migration and sectoral policies. Furthermore, one of the fundamental principles underpinning the strategy on integration and reintegration is the co-management of integration and reintegration processes through the coordination between different state structures. The Work Permit system is also promoting a whole-of-government approach.
Whole-of-society approach	Yes	Strengthening international (and domestic) cooperation is Goal 8 of 9 in the Migration Concept. This includes the introduction of a mechanism to ensure the effective participation of international partners and civil society in the policy process.

Table 2 Mapping the Objectives of the Migration Concept to the GCM Objectives

#	Goal	Objectives	GCM Objective(s)
1	<i>Enhancing Linkages between Migration Management Policy Making and Improvement of Demographic Situation in Armenia</i>	Design programs aiming at improved demographic situation	2
		Supporting return	21
2	<i>Increasing Effectiveness of Fight against Irregular and Illegal Migration</i>	Prevention of illegal border crossing	11
		Improve systems of registration of foreigner residents	1, 4, 9, 12
		Effective management of irregular migration cases	9, 13
		Strengthening control over private recruitment agencies	6
		Fight against trafficking in persons and exploitation	10
		Reduction of irregular migration of Armenian citizens	3, 5
3	<i>Increasing Effectiveness of Management of Borders, Entry, Exit and Residence of Foreigners</i>	Improvement of personal identification systems at the border	4, 11
		Improvement of the procedure of border referrals	7, 11, 12

		Improvement of migration data collection at the borders:	1, 11
		Revision of the visa policy	12
		Improvement of the system of granting residence permits	12
		Make the information about entry, asylum, residence and work	3
		Improvement of readmission and return procedures	12, 21
		Improvement of expulsion process	12, 13, 21
4	<i>Improving Protection of the Rights and Interests of Various Groups of Migrants, Improving the System of International Protection</i>	Better protection of rights and interests of Armenian citizens abroad	14, 22
		Improve rights protection of foreigners in Armenia and regulation of employment of foreigners	6, 7, 10
		Protection and social assistance to forced migrants/displaced persons (who do not fall under the refugee definition)	7, 15
		Enhancing of the international protection system	1, 11, 12
5	<i>Reforms in Organizing Integration of Foreigners in Armenia and Reintegration of Returnees, as well as Improvement of Admission Environment of Foreigners</i>	Improve access to education, healthcare and social assistance	15
		Cultural integration of immigrants	16
		Assistance to employment and involvement into economic activity	18
		Establishment of welcoming environment in Armenia	17
6	<i>Increasing Impact of Migration on Armenia's Sustainable Development</i>	Reducing brain drain, as well as outflow of young qualified professionals.	2
		Promoting well-being of migrants and members of their families and communities	15
		Assessment of intellectual and economic potential of migrants and diaspora and development of mechanisms to tap into this potential and use it for countries sustainable development.	19
		Directing foreign remittances towards human and community development:	20
		Promoting migrant and diaspora engagement:	19
7	<i>Improving Preparedness in Migration Crises Situations</i>	Creation of crisis management system for migration	23
		Establish effective systems of reception, including for access to shelter and humanitarian assistance to the affected population:	7, 12, 15
		Establish effective system for displaced population registration, documentation and referral:	4, 12
		Establish and effective system for health support	15
		Establish programs of integration assistance:	16
		Establish system of humanitarian communications	3
		Creation of flexible mechanisms for international protection	12
8		Enhancing regional, bilateral and global cooperation	23

	<i>Strengthening of International and Domestic Cooperation in Migration Management</i>	Strengthening of cooperation between government agencies	12
		Strengthening participation of international partners and Armenian civil society organizations	23
		Increasing role of Armenia in international platforms	23
9	<i>Improving Coordination, Integrity and Effectiveness of Migration Management</i>	Establishment of institutional framework for comprehensive immigration management:	12
		Increased use of evidence-based approach for development and implementation of the migration policy	1
		Improved quality and accessibility of public services provided to migrants of different groups	15
		Bringing internal migration to the agenda of migration management	1
		Closer ties with Armenian communities abroad	19

Annex 2 Assessing the Integration and Reintegration Strategy using the Guiding Principles of the GCM

Guiding principle	Principle has been integrated	Explanation
People-centred	Yes	One of the fundamental principles underpinning the strategy is a ‘personalized approach’ to integration and reintegration.
International cooperation	Yes	The strategy mentions relevant international agreements and treaties.
National sovereignty	No	No specific references
Rule of law and due process	Yes	Outlines legal procedures.
Sustainable development	Yes	One of the fundamental principles underpinning the strategy is the recognition of the development potential of migrants and returnees given the right support and environment.
Human rights	Yes	One of the fundamental principles underpinning the strategy is the importance of human rights and dignity.
Gender-responsive	Yes	The personalized approach acknowledges variations in integration and reintegration needs in part determined by sex. The strategy identifies the needs for gender and age sensitive methods to assess needs. Different categories, including LGBT persons are mentioned throughout the strategy.
Child-sensitive	Yes	The personalized approach acknowledges variations in integration and reintegration needs in part determined age. The strategy mentions child(ren) on a number occasions including references to childcare, ensuring access to education, monitoring performance in education, tailored education programmes and addressing violence against children. Children, along with women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and families are identified as targets of specific measures. The strategy identifies the needs for gender and age sensitive methods to assess needs.
Whole-of-government approach	Yes	One of the fundamental principles underpinning the strategy is co-management of integration and reintegration processes through the coordination of different state structures.
Whole-of-society approach	Yes	Under the co-management principle, the role of international, intergovernmental and local civil society organizations is recognised.

Annex 3 Mapping Key Policy Developments in the Republic of Armenia to the GCM Objectives, 2015-present

Year	Key Developments since 2015	Relevant GCM Objective(s)
2015	From 2015 and on, information campaigns launched were mainly geared at clarification of labour migration provisions of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union.	3
2015	The RA Law on changes and amendments to the Law on Refugees and Asylum was adopted by the RA National Assembly on 16 December 2015, with relevant supporting legislative acts adopted in 2016, whereby rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Armenia were aligned, to the highest level possible, with international and EU standards.	12
2015	Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty came into force	5, 23
2015	Law on Customs Regulation – customs exemption for personal effects	21
2015	Victim Identification Commission	10
2016	ICMPD established office in Yerevan	23
2016	RA Government Decree No. 493-N (12 May 2016) (procedure for issuance of labour permits to foreigners)	5, 12
2016	Bilateral MoU on visa-free regime with the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran (5 June 2016, effective from August 2016)	23
2016	Decree No. 28 on 21 July 2016 (policy concept for the integration of persons recognized as refugees and granted asylum and of long-term migrants in the Republic of Armenia)	16
2016	RA Government Decree No. 827-N of 11 August 2016 (temporarily suspending Article 23 in the law on foreigners (exceptions from labour permit requirements which has led some foreigners to become 'illegal') and assigning MLSA to investigate alternatives)	12
2016	Agreement on Cooperation in the sphere of migration between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the French Republic was signed on 27 October 2016.	23
2017	<i>Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)</i> with the European Union	23
2017	123-N government decree on the issuance of biometric passports and IDs was adopted	4
2019	the Department of Return and Reintegration established in the Migration Service	21
2019	In June 2019, Law 'On making amendments and supplements to the Law 'On identification of and support to victims of trafficking in human beings and exploitation' was adopted.	10
2020	RA Government Decree N0. 336-L from 19 March, 2020 'Government program of primary assistance for the reintegration of nationals returning to the Republic of Armenia (including involuntary returnees)'.	21
2020	Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Armenia # 670-I of 30 April, 2020 on approving the program for the introduction of an electronic management system to issue foreign nationals work permits and register employment contracts concluded with foreign nationals	1, 5, 6 ,12