

IMMIGRATION OF RUSSIAN CITIZENS TO ARMENIA DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR 2022-2023: PULL-PUSH FACTORS

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the identification of push and pull factors of immigration of Russian citizens to Armenia in the context of the projections of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Armenian society. Secondary analysis of statistical data and the sociological surveys, as well as the results of in-depth interviews, made it possible to identify the political, social and economic push factors that determine emigration from Russia (sanctions applied against Russia, partial military mobilization, worsening of economic situation, restrictions on freedom of speech and the risk of persecution); pull factors that attract and retain relocants specifically to Armenia (Armenia's liberal migration policy towards Russian citizens, favorable conditions for foreigners to do business in Armenia, the availability of financial and banking services for Russians, relatively affordable prices for housing, goods and services, and security, Christianity, hospitality and knowledge of the Russian language etc.), as well as factors pushing migrants out of Armenia (the challenges of providing an acceptable standard of living, the lack of well-paid jobs, cooperation between the special services of the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation, the threat of Azerbaijani aggression).

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian crisis, migration, relocation, push factors, pull factors, Russian citizens, Artsakh war.

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Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University, Vol. 2 (1(4)), May 2023, Pp. 137-147

Received: 14.04.2023

Revised: 24.04.2023

Accepted: 05.05.2023



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Introduction

This article is one of the first attempts to give a comprehensive assessment of the pull-push factors of the migration of Russian citizens to Armenia in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine, taking into account the changed political, social and economic conditions. In this regard, we consider our study as the beginning of an important scientific work. As a result of this study push factors forcing Russians to leave Russia, factors pulling them to Armenia as well as push-factors, forcing them to leave Armenia and their integration process in the Armenian society were studied. The study shows that urgent adoption of migration regulation and social integration strategies is required.

Under the conditions of the armed conflict in Ukraine, and then due to the war in Ukraine since 2022, the phenomenon of migration leads to a gradual change in all spheres of life in the recipient country, including changes in the political, economic and social situation. The transformation affects the ethnic composition of the population and its cultural norms, creating conflict risks in the recipient society.

The research context

War is a disaster because it forces the inhabitants of the warring countries to leave their place of residence, home, motherland and take refuge somewhere else in the hope of preserving their life and welfare. The Ukrainian crisis created a radically new social and political situation, which summarizes not only the post-Soviet history of the last decades, but possibly also the entire trajectory of world politics after the Cold War (Zubok 2023; Welfens 2022, 5-10, 45-52). All the political processes taking place in the modern world, and especially in the post-Soviet space, are influenced by the ongoing military operations in Ukraine (George and Sandler 2022).

Armenia, which during the 44-day Artsakh war of 2020 had around 4 thousand victims¹, was attacked again on September 13, 2022 by the Azerbaijani armed forces. Despite the fact that a significant part of the administrative territory of Nagorno Karabakh is occupied by Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh is facing post-war economic, social and political crises. In fact, Armenia also became a refuge for tens of thousands of people who consider their reasons for leaving Artsakh more influential and significant than the difficulties they face in Armenia. This is a situation where people flee their country due to war and settle in a country, which is also in the situation of war. Moreover, Armenia is still in 'neither war nor peace' conditions, surviving under the threat of resumption of war at any moment.

¹ "Through investigation of the criminal case it was found out that the total number of the military personnel and civilians killed in the Republic of Artsakh and in the Republic of Armenia in the result of the aggressive war unleashed by Azerbaijan is 3822. As of 21.03.2022 the location of 187 servicemen and 21 civilians is unknown" (Investigative Committee of the RA. 2022. "Information about Military Personnel and Civilians Killed during 44-day War as well as those whose Location is Unknown." March 21, 2022. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.investigative.am/en/news/view/44orya-paterazm-texekatvutyun.html>).

The Republic of Armenia is on the list of countries that accept immigrants as a result of the military conflict in Ukraine. During the first six months since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia or the so-called “special military operation” (Nagy 2023, 47-50; Voitsikhovkyi and Bakumov 2023, 134-139; Gill 2022, 121-123), about 1,000 citizens of Ukraine and Belarus, and about 40,000 citizens of Russia, moved to Armenia (Statistical Committee RA 2022). During the first week starting from September 21, 2022, when the partial mobilization of reservists was announced in Russia, the frequency of flights from Russia to Armenia almost tripled².

According to the data of the RA Police, during the first ten months of 2022, 19,630 people applied for Armenian citizenship, of which 14,661 are Russian citizens³. The vast majority of applicants, 97%, were Armenian. A sharp increase in applications for RA citizenship was recorded a week after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war. If in January and February 2022 643 and 892 people applied for RA citizenship, respectively, in March - 1670, April - 2154, May - 2180, June - 2378, July - 2645, August - 2363, September - 2449, from October 1 to October 27 2256 people applied⁴.

The push-pull factors of migration

Migration is one of the multifactorial phenomena of modern life. In recent years, the increasing intensity of migration processes is caused by wars, political and economic crises and migration policy. Their various aspects are comparatively analyzed in many researches.

In modern studies, it has become necessary, in addition to the study of migration volumes, directions, the composition of migration flows, factors, and the description of migration stages, to make a transition to a deep and comprehensive research of migration patterns and mechanisms, social models, to diagnose and predict migration processes, on the basis of which migration policies can be implemented. Concepts of migration theory have expanded over time and become multi-content, but describing different groups of migrants seem to be no longer sufficient to identify this multifaceted phenomenon (Lee 1966, 47-57; Hartmann-Hirsch and Amétépé 2021, 41-59; Ojiaku, Nkamnebe and Nwaizugbo 2018, 1-17; Bansal, Taylor and James 2005, 96-115; Pham 2018, 161-175; Prieto Rosas and Gay 2015, 1-27).

Current historical and social realities require terms describing new groups of migrants. Among them are the term ‘relocants’ that are in a similar situation as a refugee, as well as those that are widely used today (Oswald 2007). Russian citizens who move to Armenia and other countries due to the outbreak of war in Ukraine are called relocants because they move their families and businesses to other countries where they can live for a relatively long time without an entry visa. These people cannot do business in their homeland because of the war in Ukraine and sanctions

² Presidential Decree No. 647 of 21.09.2022 “On Declaring Partial Mobilization in the Russian Federation.” Accessed January 21, 2023. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202209210001>.

³ Source: Muradyan, Tirayr. 2022. “19,630 Foreigners Apply for Armenian Citizenship; Most from Russia.” *Hetq*, November 28, 2022. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://hetq.am/hy/article/150617>.

⁴ *ibid*

against Russia. Such factors push them to other countries, where there are other pull factors for living and working (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022; Dicken and Öberg 1996; Marois, Bélanger and Lutz 2020).

The push and pull factors of migration were studied by Everett Lee in the framework of his Push-Pull Factors econometric model (Lee 1966). According to this model, each area has different migration factors that determine the migratory activity of people in the form of immigration and emigration. In this regard, Lee considers the factors that condition the migration process and include the following factors: “1. Factors associated with the area of origin, 2. Factors associated with the area of destination. 3. Intervening obstacles, 4. Personal factors.” (Lee 1966, 49-50). According to Lee, there are two groups of factors affecting a person at the places of departure and arrival: positive and negative. In addition, there are obstacles between the points of departure and arrival, which are called intermediate factors (distance, cost of housing, border and customs control between countries, etc). The last group of factors influencing migration includes personal characteristics and life situations. According to Lee, economic factors (unemployment, low incomes and high taxes), social and political factors (poverty, discrimination, restrictions on freedom of conscience and religion, wars), unfavorable climatic conditions can become repulsive factors. The high level of economic development, high incomes, security, access to jobs (including the informal sector, which is more influential in the case of illegal immigration), etc. can be distinguished among the pulling factors. Push factors also include personal circumstances such as the reaction of potential immigrants to the host country’s policies toward them, the economic conditions for doing business, and the attitudes of the host society (Lee 1966).

Marie McAuliffe, doing a comparative analysis of the driving forces of migration, singled out the following pulling factors: the host country’s resettlement policy, how immigrants are accepted in the given country, the economic conditions of the host country, the presence of the relevant community, diaspora (McAuliffe 2017, 103-104). Later, Sture Öberg developed this theory by classifying the concept of hard and soft factors. Among the hard factors are humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, natural disasters, and the soft factors are poverty, social inequality and unemployment (Öberg 1996).

Research methodology

In this article, the push-pull factors determining the migration of Russian citizens to Armenia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and war are analyzed. Both the economic difficulties faced by Russian relocators in Armenia, as well as the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and war on Armenian society have been analyzed.

During the research, a secondary analysis of official statistics, the Ministry of Economy of the RA and the State Revenue Committee of the RA, the International Republican Institute (IRI), Modex Analytics, OK Russians research website, and Hetq Media Factory data was carried out in order to reveal the social portrait of Russians who moved to Armenia. In order to analyze the push-pull factors of migration, 26 in-

depth interviews were conducted with those relocants who settled in Armenia after February 24, 2022.

Analysis of push factors from Russia

According to the results of various researches, the vast majority of Russian relocants are people aged 22-39 who work in the field of information technology. According to a survey conducted by Hetq Media Factory, 40% of the respondents left Russia because they or a family member were of conscription age. One third of the respondents stated that the restriction of digital and technical services directly affected their work, which became one of the main reasons for relocation. Meanwhile, only 10% of the respondents lost their previous job and have not yet found a new one⁵.

The social profile of Russians moving to Armenia differs significantly before and after partial conscription. According to the results of in-depth interviews, immediately after the outbreak of the war, politically active citizens came to Armenia, who have a strongly negative attitude towards the war and Putin's regime, they were afraid of administrative sanctions, criminal prosecution and arrests. Middle-income people who worked for international companies and could switch to telecommuting also left Russia in the early stages of the conflict. Starting from September 21, 2022, when partial conscription was announced, young male Russian citizens moved to Armenia to avoid military service and partial military mobilization.

Summarizing the circumstances contributing to emigration from Russia, the following push-pull factors can be distinguished:

1. Sanctions applied by Western countries against Russia, due to which:
 - a) *Russian companies and their employees moved to Armenia, the main purpose of which was to preserve jobs and incomes,*
 - b) *Russian citizens were afraid that they would no longer be able to leave Russia,*
 - c) *Russian citizens did not want to put up with the impact of sanctions.*
2. Fear of war and fear of military mobilization.
3. The risks of deterioration of the economic situation in Russia, when there is a devaluation of the ruble, a reduction in the volume of production and trade, a reduction in income, etc.
4. Restrictions on freedom of speech in Russia and the risk of persecution.
5. Political position against the war.

The following quotes from in-depth interviews best describe the situation and the fears of the interviewees:

- “I am against the war, my relatives are in Ukraine.”
- “Dictatorship, threat and danger are everywhere in Russia.”
- “I’m afraid of my phone being tapped and being prosecuted.”

⁵ Source: Hetq Media Factory. 2022. ““We stopped feeling ourselves in our country”: why Russians are relocating to Armenia.” *June 20, 2022*. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://mediafactory.am/en>.

- “People in Russia just went out to peaceful demonstrations chanting “No to war” (Нет войне), but the police fined them for discrediting the Russian army. They changed the slogan and put 8 stars instead of 8 letters. They were arrested again. They replaced the stars with the numbers 3 and 5.”

Analysis of pull factors to Armenia

The war in Ukraine and the economic upheavals in Russia caused the migration flows to Armenia to increase. The Armenian government quickly opened its doors to citizens and companies from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus who wanted to move to Armenia for temporary residence. The Ministry of Economy of the RA created a working group whose purpose was to provide assistance to foreign entrepreneurs to settle in Armenia or start a new business here. On January 1, 2022, the Electronic Work Permit System was launched to digitize the process of issuing work permits and residence status to foreigners in Armenia, as well as to avoid long queues at the Passport and Visa Department⁶.

Russian citizens have the right to enter RA with their local passports or identification cards. Citizens of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine can enter Armenia without a visa and can stay in Armenia for a maximum of 180 days a year without a residence status. In order to extend the deadline, they usually visit neighboring Georgia for a few days and then enter Armenia again⁷. Even if they exceed the allowed period, the fine is 50 thousand AMD, which they do not consider a large amount.

Summarizing the pull factors for Russian citizens in Armenia, the following can be distinguished:

1. Liberal migration policy for Russian citizens.
2. Liberal conditions for conducting business activities in Armenia, fast and easy state registration of new business and the tax rates are quite suitable.
3. Access to financial and banking services for Russians, including:
 - a) The possibility of converting Russian rubles into Armenian drams or other currencies.
 - b) Cards of the internal MIR banking system of Russia are valid in Armenia.
 - c) Armenian banking services are available for Russians. Different banks have different requirements, including: temporary registration, business registration, work in Armenian companies, high cost of banking services and credit card service, etc.
 - d) Russian citizens can manage their accounts in Russian banks in different ways from Armenia.
4. Relatively short distance between Armenia and Russia.
5. People in Armenia are hospitable and friendly, they treat Russians well.

⁶ The Ministry of Economy of the RA. 2022. “Citizens of the EAEU in Armenia are exempted from the need to obtain a work permit and a residence permit.” *December 22, 2022*. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://mineconomy.am/ru/page/2077>.

⁷ “Law of the RA “On Foreigners.” Adopted on December 25, 2006. *The National Assembly of the RA, January 16, 2007*. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=73272>.

6. The possibility to communicate in Russian language with almost everyone in state institutions and private services.
7. Armenia is a Christian country.
8. Frequent air flights between Russia and Armenia.
9. Presence of relatives or friends in Armenia.
10. The prices of apartment rent, taxi, food and other goods are relatively affordable, especially for those who move from Moscow and St. Petersburg.
11. Armenia is considered by Russian citizens as a safe and secure country.
12. Favorable weather conditions.
13. Organic and delicious food.
14. Rich cultural life, music and concerts, as well as concerts and performances of artists from Russia in Armenia.

The majority of respondents stated that they made the decision to move to Armenia based on the advice of acquaintances who visited or lived in Armenia, or on the basis of the positive experience of other relocants. Various social and media platforms are created and used by relocatants to share their experiences of housing, cafes and restaurants, transportation, sightseeing and entertainment within their community.

Analysis of push factors from Armenia

Initially, the relocatants planned to stay in Armenia for 3 to 6 months because they did not make long-term plans, hoping to return to Russia as soon as the war ends, sanctions are eased, or the Russian government changes. Many, mostly political activists, who are persecuted by the Russian authorities, consider Armenia as a transit country to move to other Western countries. Armenians who are Russian citizens usually plan to live in Armenia for a long time.

The possibilities of finding a job for relocants in Armenia depend on their professions and qualifications. Those citizens of Russia who work in the field of information technology usually have no problem finding a job. Some are able to keep their jobs, others find new jobs and work remotely for companies in different countries around the world. There are enough vacancies in the Armenian labor market that do not require higher education and knowledge of the Armenian language (cleaning services, babysitting, construction, delivery and waiter jobs, other jobs in the service sector). Those jobs are quickly occupied by relocants. Those professionals who have higher education but cannot work online (teachers, lawyers, economists) cannot find a job in Armenia also because of lack of knowledge of Armenian. For example, with the support of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia, doctors started working in hospitals throughout Armenia. Relocants who left real estate back in Russia receive income from rent. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents mention a significant decrease in their incomes due to the Ukrainian crisis. The exception is the remote workers, whose income has not decreased, and life in Armenia is relatively cheap.

Analyzing the push factors for migrants from Armenia, we can single out the following:

1. The inability to ensure a normal standard of living for them in Armenia and the lack of infrastructure.
2. The circumstance of not finding a profitable job.
3. Armenia's strong connection with Russia's security and other special services, which causes fear of persecution among civil activists.
4. Azerbaijan's aggression towards Armenia, which can start a new war at any time and escalate the conflict in the region.

The following quotes from in-depth interviews best describe the situation and the fears of the interviewees:

- “The Russian FSB is present in Armenia and I am afraid that they are following me.”
- “Approximately 60 percent of goods in Armenian stores are produced in Russia. Tax and customs services of Armenia and Russia transfer information to each other, and extradition to Russia works in Armenia. I think that if there is a global crisis in Russia, there is a danger that it will affect Armenia as well. So, here too, it is impossible to avoid serious problems.”
- “There are reasons why I don't want to stay in Armenia. The tense situation around Nagorno-Karabakh. If the situation escalates (and it is now), I will immediately leave for Georgia.”

The changes in the Armenian society caused by the immigration of Russian relocants

If, as of July 2022, there were more than two thousand information technology companies operating in Armenia, compared to February of the same year, their number has increased significantly. Moreover, 4,653 of the 4,949 Russian citizens working in information technology companies of Armenia were employed in February-July 2022.

The Armenian dram strengthened against the US dollar and the euro, as Armenia's banking sector provided significant growth in almost all indicators. Private companies were able to attract new customers, for which they began to revise their marketing strategies. The entertainment market began to transform to meet the needs of relocants. This, in turn, contributed to the deepening and expansion of the network of joint working areas. Such economic and social activity led to the fact that the sale and rental prices of apartments in Armenia increased by 7 percent in March-May 2022⁸. The increase in rent of apartments and prices of consumer goods had a negative effect on the middle class and socially disadvantaged population of Armenia, forcing them to review the cost structure, as well as the future budget and life planning.

The Russian language invaded everyday life in post-Soviet Armenia, and private businesses began to require employees to speak Russian in order to attract new customers. As a result, Russian is spoken much more often in the Armenian service sector.

⁸ Caucasian Knot. 2022. “How many Russians came to Armenia?” *June 7, 2022*. Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/blogs/83781/posts/55084>.

Summarizing the above, it can be noted that the migration flow of Russian citizens to Armenia had, has and will have a significant impact on the economic, social and cultural structures of the Armenian society.

Conclusion and discussion

The problem of Russian-Ukrainian relations goes far beyond the framework of relations between only two countries. Affecting many other peoples and states, primarily the European region, each time it acquires an increasingly distinct global dimension. In this regard, the scientific assessment of the level of international cooperation achieved to date on the problems of forced migration of the population of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus allows us to re-arrange the geopolitical accents of the role of Armenia, confirming a significant change in the geopolitical and geostrategic position of the small state, as well as its place in the current world order.

In the current conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war since February 24, 2022, forced migration is a sign of war and crises, which have a negative impact on global stability, as well as on national identity and culture. Of course, the ratio of stability and instability in the post-Soviet space was determined by their own factors, but the impact of the migration destabilizer also had an effect to a large extent. Nevertheless, with all the differences in the qualitative characteristics of the economic and political models of Armenia and Russia, there are common trends and mechanisms for both countries in the context of push and pull factors of migration. The phenomenon of push and pull factors of migration between Armenia and Russia leads to a gradual change in all spheres of life in the recipient country of immigrants, including changes in the political, economic and social situation.

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