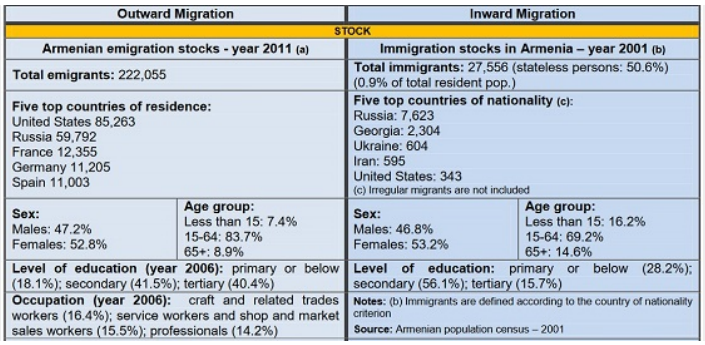
ALARM OVER EXODUS FROM ARMENIA

Posted on March 3, 2011 by Keghart



Outward Migration		Inward Migration	
STOCK			
Armenian emigration stocks - year 2011 (a)		**Immigration stocks in Armenia – year 2001** (b)	
Total emigrants: 222,055		**Total immigrants:** 27,556 (stateless persons: 50.6%) (0.9% of total resident pop.)	
Five top countries of residence: United States 85,263 Russia 59,792 France 12,355 Germany 11,205 Spain 11,003		**Five top countries of nationality** (c): Russia: 7,623 Georgia: 2,304 Ukraine: 604 Iran: 595 United States: 343 (c) Irregular migrants are not included	
Sex: Males: 47.2% Females: 52.8%	**Age group:** Less than 15: 7.4% 15-64: 83.7% 65+: 8.9%	**Sex:** Males: 46.8% Females: 53.2%	**Age group:** Less than 15: 16.2% 15-64: 69.2% 65+: 14.6%
Level of education (year 2006): primary or below (18.1%); secondary (41.5%); tertiary (40.4%)		**Level of education:** primary or below (28.2%); secondary (56.1%); tertiary (15.7%)	
Occupation (year 2006): craft and related trades workers (16.4%); service workers and shop and market sales workers (15.5%); professionals (14.2%)		**Notes:** (b) Immigrants are defined according to the country of nationality criterion **Source:** Armenian population census – 2001	

Category: Opinions

Gayane Abrahamyan, ArmeniaNow.com, 2 March 2011
Migration experts warn that Armenia faces a serious demographic disaster, brought on by emigration, and urge the government to see the risks in a program, introduced by the Federal Migration Service of Russia, which offers Armenians easy conditions for permanent residence in Russia.

The program of residence in Russia has been introduced in Armenia for two years, and it has been implemented enthusiastically since 2010.

According to the decree on supporting voluntary immigration to the Russian Federation, issued in 2006, all those people who want to reside in 26 regions of Russia (especially in outlying regions), not only get a job, a lump sum payment, a compensation for departure and their belongings transfer, but they also receive citizenship of Russia within a few months (not later than six months, as prescribed by a law).

Depending on the locality, a one-time payment could be between $4,000 and $8,000. Job opportunities in Russia also vary depending on the existing demand in particular areas, but the matter mostly concerns unskilled labor.

On average 60,000 people leave Armenia permanently annually in recent years – most to Russia – and 1.1 million people have left Armenia since its independence.

Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan in his February 25 interview stated that the government is worried about the emigration issue, mainly the figures provided by the Migration Service, and it has approved a special program which "is directed at decreasing the emigration rates and creating favorable conditions for our compatriots' repatriation." However, the prime minister's statement inspires no hope for those who want to compare his statement with reality.

"What does 'it worries' mean, if they cannot even prevent the program which leaves Armenia without Armenians, initiated by their strategic partner?" says sociologist, expert, Ruben Yeganyan (who has worked with UN and other international institutions on the issue).

Daily about 100 potential migrants visit the Armenian Office of the Federal Migration Service of Russia (where constant queues are formed), about 10 applications are submitted each day, and according to the head of the Armenian Office, about 7 out of 10 are accepted.

Seminars about the program are held in provinces of Armenia, too; however, it is not advertised through wider means, which, according to Jhirayr Sefilyan, head of 'Sardarapat' opposition movement, was done with a special agreement. "According to my information, the government said, "Do that program but do it as quiet as possible'," Sefilyan says.

The specialists of the service work with more target groups.

Svetlana Stepanova, head of the representation of the Migration Service of the Russian Federation told ArmeniaNow that she spoke about the program in various provinces of Armenia.

“I have been to Ijevan, some villages of Lori province, Armavir, and we have explained to people the details of the program. We present our program, but we do not preach anything,” Stepanova says.

According to Stepanova, about 2,000 people left Armenia, applying to that program last year. Most of them were populated in Kaliningrad, Tambov, Kaluga and Lipetsk oblasts (regions) of Russia.

“In fact, we are not very much satisfied with the results. Many people come and say that they want to apply for jobs only, and not for a permanent residence; Armenians love their country,” Stepanova says, adding that so far this year the number of people who are interested in the program is 2.5 times more as compared to last year.

Meanwhile, many have speculations that the presented figures are decreased deliberately.

“In 2010, when this program was redrafted and became more profitable and attractive (because they promise to settle problems connected with jobs, residence, citizenship, they give allowances, and even pay off the travel expenses), the index of emigration from Armenia, according to official data, increased by 39 percent as compared to 2009. And this happened, when there was crisis in Russia and even working migrants did not leave for that country,” French-Armenian public figure, war veteran Sefilyan told ArmeniaNow.

According to the data of the General Department of Civil Aviation, last year the number of people who left Armenia was 87,000 more as compared to 2009; moreover, 60,000 of them left with no plan to return.

Nevertheless, these indexes do not worry Gagik Yeganyan, the head of the Agency for Migration Issues within the Ministry of Territorial Administration. He believes that the number of people who leave Armenia by the program is not mass migration. “If it were ‘mass’, we would know about it,” he says.

“Russia settles its demographic issues, it collects labor force. Many other countries do the same, for example, Canada, New Zealand. It is a normal policy,” Yeganyan told ArmeniaNow.

Meanwhile, demographers are concerned over who must address the issues of demographic decline.

“The situation is really dangerous, because the generation of those years (1980s), which provided the highest birthrate, currently has only 40,000 children annually, meanwhile when the turn of becoming mothers for the generation of 1990s comes (averagely 30,000 children annually), we will register a sharp decline,” Karine Kuyumjyan, who heads the Population Census and Demography Department at the National Statistical Service of Armenia, told ArmeniaNow.