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**EFFECTS OF LABOUR MIGRATION ON SOCIAL CHANGE  
IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

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**Keywords:** social changes, labour migration, host country and country of origin, diaspora.

The topic of the article is inspired by the global flow of labour migration, especially the growing pace of this migration in Armenia in recent years. The widespread Armenian diaspora has become an additional factor influencing the formation of a transnational network of labour migration. This network implies a new approach to labour migration and research on its consequences. The main aim of this article is to examine the social consequences of labour migration, in particular its impact on social changes in the country of origin. On the basis of the migration approach, the exchange approach and the social network, the article discusses how labour migration affects social changes, which aspects are affected, and what specific manifestations it has. The study was conducted with the use of secondary source analysis methods and document analysis.

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## WPLYW MIGRACJI ZAROBKOWEJ NA ZMIANY SPOŁECZNE W KRAJU POCHODZENIA

**Słowa kluczowe:** zmiany społeczne, migracja zarobkowa, kraj przyjmujący oraz kraj pochodzenia, diaspora.

Wybór tematu jest uwarunkowany globalnym przepływem migracji zarobkowej, w szczególności rosnącym tempem tej migracji w Armenii w ostatnich latach. Rozpowszechniona diaspora ormiańska stała się dodatkowym czynnikiem wpływającym na kształtowanie transnarodowej sieci migracji zarobkowej. Sieć ta sugeruje nowe podejście do migracji zarobkowej i do badań jej konsekwencji. Głównym celem artykułu jest zbadanie społecznych konsekwencji migracji zarobkowej, w szczególności jej wpływu na zmiany społeczne w kraju pochodzenia. Na podstawie podejścia migracyjnego, podejścia wymiany oraz sieci społecznościowej, w artykule omówiono jak migracja zarobkowa wpływa na zmiany społeczne, w jakich aspektach, jakie ma konkretne przejawy. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone przy użyciu metod analizy źródeł wtórnych oraz analizy dokumentów.

### Introduction

In recent years, researchers have shown a great interest in the extent and the social consequences of labour migration. These are often put into a demographic, economic, political and other context. But the consequences of labour migration have a deeper effect. The study of the social effects of labour migration is of great importance, and research data provide a primary analytical basis for revealing a more profound social impact. They affect social life at different levels and bring about great changes. It is noteworthy that these changes are more significant in the country of origin.

The paper outlines a growing rate of emigration and labour migration from the Republic of Armenia observed in recent years, which poses many threats. Armenian labour migrants usually leave their countries of origin primarily to support their families. However, only remittances do not solve the serious social problems in their homeland. The consequences are multiplied by a growing number of migrants and become more considerable. Moreover, the continued frequency of labour migration leads to self-organization and displays community elements. Thus, labour migration becomes an influential factor in the social sphere of the country of origin through the behaviour of particular migrants and their collective public influence.

## **Data and Methodology**

Within the framework of the paper, the phenomenon of labour migration and its effects on social changes in the country of origin were studied using an interdisciplinary approach which integrates cultural anthropology, ethno-sociology and Diaspora studies.

The research was carried out by combining document analysis, desk research methods and tools. The scarcity of additional information required has been supplemented by processing secondary data in the research field. The methodology used ensures reliability of the results obtained, which are theoretical and practical preconditions for the application of a number of methods.

This paper uses field material and the results of sociological surveys conducted by governmental and non-governmental organizations, international organizations, independent ethnographers, which were subjected to selective analysis. The selection was based on their problem, methodology and data reliability. Each data source was analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Details of each research methodology are provided in the analytical section.

## **Theoretical and historical overview**

The issue of labour migration research has become more and more important in recent years due to the growing trends in the world, and in particular in Armenia. This has led to the problem of creating a mechanism that can be applied to theory. For multilayer analyses, the existing approaches in the literature and research should be discussed. This article conducts analyses through the prism of migration theory using transnational and network approaches. In an early approach, most studies on migration focused on the theory of adaptation of migrants to the place of immigration. Then, a new approach to migration emphasized the attachment of migrants to the country of origin as well as people and traditions outside the host country (G. Schiller 1992, Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Vertovec and Cohen 1999, Portes 1999). Contemporary national and local government policies, while largely replacing traditional models of assimilation with multiculturalism, have yet to catch up with new approaches in migration theory that recognize the ways in which modern migrants live in transnational communities (Foner, Nancy, 1997).

A review of Armenian research shows that studies have been performed in this field since 19th century, which indicates that labour migration in Armenia is not a new phenomenon: it has a history with a periodic and permanent character. With time, a culture of labour migration has deve-

loped, which is evident in ethnographic materials: the words “khopan” and “pandkhtutyun” describe the migration phenomenon and have a great social meaning.

As regards labour migration issues in the 19th century, M. Nalbandyan emphasises the reasons of poverty and unemployment while highlighting the issue of cultural adaptation of migrants in the new cultural environment (Nalbandyan 1983). Analysing the periodicals published at the time, the approximate extent of labour migration can be inferred. Each family had one or two (or rarely even four or five) labour migrants who moved to nearby large cities for manual or craft work in difficult working and living conditions.

The analysis of field materials collected by ethnographers during this period shows that despite strong ethnic traditions of the rural population and the existence of “strict norms”, the long absence of emigrants often led to divorce. According to E. Lalayan, labour migration accelerated the collapse of the “gerdastan” model of Armenian large family (Lalayan 1903). So, in this light, the historical periodization of migration flows of Armenians should be discussed.

For centuries, Armenians have been forced to leave their places of residence because of political and religious persecution, difficult economic conditions and natural disasters. The most tragic blow to the Armenian communities occurred in 1915, when an estimated 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians died in massacres. Those who were able to escape the genocide resettled in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Russia, Europe (France, in particular), the USA, etc. Armenians residing in the territory of the newly established Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic remained exposed to forced migration and resettlement. During the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, thousands of Armenians were deported to Siberia and Central Asia.

Following World War II, new waves of migration and resettlement took place. Nevertheless, some permanent and seasonal labour migration occurred, in particular to the “virgin lands” in the south-eastern region, and Armenians became one of the most mobile population groups of the Soviet Union. It was, however, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that large-scale processes of migration gained new momentum in the Republic of Armenia. (Rasuly-Paleczek et al 2017)

Armenia rapidly becomes a country of net emigration and this fact implies severe consequences at different levels: economic, social and demographic. It is important to point out that the statistical data on migration capture only the regular emigrants who change their permanent residence. So labour migration is hard to quantify although in recent years it has

become the most important component of Armenian migration.

### **The current situation of labour migration in Armenia**

Labour migration is currently one of the most significant migration flows in the world. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the total number of international migrants as of 2019 was 272 million, 74% of whom were labour migrants (United Nations 2020), while in 2010, 90% of 214 million migrants left to work in their home country (International Labour Office 2010). In recent decades, deep-seated political, economic, and social reforms in “transformational” or developing countries have led to the formation of a new wave of migration, especially for the low paid workers segment of society.

In the Republic of Armenia, labour migration indicators are not clearly reflected in separate bulletins. They are calculated only according to the exit and entry protocols of state checkpoints, which, however, fail to depict the real reasons for leaving, employment in the country of entry, etc. However, according to the UN DESA data report, the number of international migrants from Armenia in 2019 amounted to 190.2 thousand people. The number of labour migrants was 60.3% (United Nations 2019). This is quite a large number, which can be understood by turning to research data.

The research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods provided by M. Galstyan (2011). Quantitative surveys were conducted in 2006 among 360 households in 12 rural communities in four regions of Armenia. In-depth interviews were conducted with 83 labour migrants and their families in 10 regions of Armenia during the 2007-2012 expeditions of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, as well as by international, governmental and non-governmental organizations in 2001.

Table 1

The main reasons of leaving for labour migration

Lack of work on place	38.7
Low wages	27.9
Lack of job by profession	13.5
Lack of conditions for doing business	10.1
Lack of prospects for development of Armenia	5.3
Legal insecurity	3.7
Other	0.7
Total:	100

*Source:* Ethno-sociological research conducted by Galstyan M., 2011.

Table 1 shows the results of the quantitative research. The main reasons for labour migration are socio-economic. Economic reasons are both bilateral for the host and the countries of origin. On the one hand, they solve a socio-economic problem for the country of origin; on the other hand, they provide cheap labour for the host country. And from a financial point of view, they provide a wide platform for convergent income and remittances. In the last five years alone, the inflow of foreign currency (about \$300 million) through labour migrants' remittance to Armenia has exceeded the amount of funding received through tourism, which is considered a priority. However, with this background cause, we see periods of sharp increase in regular migration flows. Statistically, for example, after each political election there is an increase. Thus, it may be concluded that there are also political or civil reasons for migration.

Labour migration, with all its consequences, has merged with the daily lives of migrants and continues to be present in their lives as long as their emigration plans last.

It is important to find out to what extent this approach is strengthened by the migrant's personal experience: are they one-off or permanent cases? The answers to the question: "How many years have you been leaving/have you gone abroad for work?", it can be concluded that the migrants have been absent from the family with or without breaks in the following duration: 10.3% – 1, 18.2% – 2, 18.8% – 3, 22.3% – 4-5, 15.8% – 6-8, 10.6% – 9-12 and 4.1 % – 13-16 years. (Galstyan 2012, p. 254) This explains the high frequency and intensity of migration, which, in turn, has deeper social consequences. It is important to analyse the data obtained through qualitative methods to understand the substantive meaning of the reasons for leaving, own statements of the respondents, and their attitude to the process.

"I am already 28 years old, but I am not married, I am going to earn money for that purpose" (Gegharkunik region, Vardenik village, man, 28 years old). "My two sons are married, but we all live together. We are going to Russia to earn money and build a separate house for my eldest son" (Lori region, Mets Parni village, man, 56 years old). "My daughter got engaged and is getting married. I am going to cover those expenses" (Vayots Dzor, Areni village, man, 49 years old). "I didn't build my father's grave, I'm going to bring money to build the grave" (Tavush region, Ijevan, man, 47 years old). "We had debts, my son and I went to "khopan" to Russia for two years to earn money" (Tavush region, Ijevan, man, 45 years old) (Galstyan 2011, p. 169).

These quotations describe the core content of the notion of labour migration as perceived by the respondents. Migration is not just a source of income through remittances (as a result of the super-mobility of the modern world). It is an integral part of social life and should be described just in this context. According to the RA statistics service, a large number of labour migrants are men aged 29-39 and 39-49, which has a great impact on the demographics of the country of origin, as well as on the social environment.

Men of this age group have certain skills and abilities, are at working age, have a relatively stable and clear value system, oriented views, and as such they are of great importance for any society. Their absence leads not only to general social rearrangements and the violation of the norms of distribution, but also to serious changes at a more private, individual level, i.e. the family and the social micro-environment. Their absence raises a number of issues: changes in the marriage age threshold, in the number of divorces, in family traditions and rituals. Within the family, it leads to a major socio-psychological impact. Transformations of marital relations, changes in the roles of family members, changes in children's education, upbringing, alienation, etc. However, in this paper, it is especially important to analyse the impact of labour migration on the social situation in the country as a whole, through analysing the deeper levels of the effect on social life.

### **Labour migration and social network**

The long experience of labour migration among Armenians has led to the crystallization of this process and the self-organization of migrants. A number of factors driving migration in the country of origin and the various challenges in the country of entry create an intermediate space where the existing resources need to be combined to solve problems. This transnational space includes both new social connections and previous ones. The network of Armenian migrants is formed within the framework of compatriots, relatives, friends and neighbours. As a rule, they are homogeneous in ethnic composition, but also consist of intra-ethnic groups, which are characterized by the origin of a certain region of Armenia. These networks perform the functions of job finding and adaptation in the host country of Armenian newcomers-migrants. The networks also predetermine the direction of emigration of their families and relatives in Armenia, and they promote the formation of ethno-local areas in a foreign environment. It turns out that the social network of migrants bridges not only cultures – spaces – in a broad sense, but also at the individual level of families and individuals. Depending on the quality (intensity, frequency, etc.) of the existing relationship

between them, this bridge connection may gradually weaken or strengthen. In this context, the intensity of the relationship requires mutual support.

Labour migrants have relatives, friends or acquaintances living in the country of origin, and it should be noted that this is primarily a way of obtaining information about the country of entry, which is not always objective. Modern means of communication allow for more frequent and effective communication between network members. This has a positive effect on maintaining and strengthening their ties, but at the same time, it strengthens the need for reunion. In other words, social processes between migrants and their families are transferred to the cross-border network platform. It is rather “beneficial” for migrants: it is safer, more secure, has no clear boundaries, performs a buffer function between the origin and host country. The accumulation of large amounts of social capital here leads to the involvement of a new resource. The latter is expressed in the combination of social ties of migrants, which gradually brings the members of family, distant relatives, friends, neighbours and so on to a network space (Kadushin, 2004). This sequence is not accidental and is based on the logic of relatives “zoning” in Armenian traditions. Based on the above observations, we can conclude that any person whose primary social ties have the status of a migrant can be considered to be a potential migrant.

### **Labour migration in the context of social change**

In the context of huge labour migration flows, a number of social phenomena and spheres is partially or completely changed. One of the first major changes is the job market and the work environment. It is important to observe what changes the professional and work culture of labour migrants undergo.

Due to the regular and oscillating nature of their relocations, labour migrants do not sufficiently assimilate the culture of the given country in the absence of language barriers, special integration programs, and as a result it is deformed.

The Armenian Diaspora, with its centuries-old experience of living in a foreign environment, plays an important role in a successful adaptation to the new environment. With its spread, the Armenian Diaspora is present in a number of countries around the world. Diaspora Armenians with their compact residence and large community resources have a social impact in their host countries. Thus, in the conditions of continuous emigration from Armenia, the Diaspora acts as an influential factor in the host country and a representative of the interests of migrants. Active community activities promote the adaptation and integration of labour migrants, engaging them



in the Armenianness environments.

However, leaving the country of origin in such large-scale flows, labour migrant leave gaps in the job market that are filled by lower skilled and uncompetitive local workers. In this sense, the culture that labour migrants import to the country of origin is important. This means culture in the broadest sense, including professional and work culture as well as civil culture. It does not always meet the priority of the country of origin, the requirements of the labour market, but it is dominated by professional skills, better self-organization of working groups. In this way, labour migrant spread the culture of the host country to the country of origin.

With reference to the network principle of self-organization of labour migration, it should be noted that transnational migration networks (Vertovec, 2002) have long ceased to be merely buffer zones between the “cultures” of the two countries. They act as a factor in both host and origin countries. In connection with this, it is appropriate to note that the Civil Code of Armenia (1995) provides for the right to dual citizenship, which can be used by both Armenians of the Diaspora (which is almost twice as large as the population of Armenia), as well as temporary labour migrants. In addition, in order to successfully adapt to the countries of entry and to take advantage of certain privileges, a large number of migrants receive citizenship of the host country. Though, they continue to stay in that country only during the period of work and return to Armenia regularly (at least once every 8 months).

In the current huge flow of labour migration, their intermediate social status can play a decisive role in a number of areas of Armenia through direct impact. Thus, the Armenian society is not limited to the permanent population and even the Armenian Diaspora. It also includes labour migrants as a unit characterized by group social peculiarities. It should be noted that it does not matter whether the migrant workers are in a “pendulum situation”, at the adaptation stage, or if they have already passed the mentioned stages. It is more important what kind of self-perception they have; whether they belong to the transnational migration network; carry the value system of that space; or maybe they are out of state and governmental influence, out of public solidarity. Such a perception automatically frees migrants from public responsibility and control, and if the latter has the citizenship of another country, it also relieves them from state control.

### **Labour migrants in time of pandemic crisis**

COVID-19 epidemic has had an unprecedented impact on all walks of life. Experts point to the irreversible consequences in the social sphere, which

will lead to the adoption of the “new normal” and new standards of behaviour. Labour migrants around the world have also undergone great changes. As stated in the OCSE report, “A significant amount of socioeconomic literature confirms that exclusion is costly, while inclusion pays off. An effective post-pandemic recovery should keep this principle in due consideration, fostering inclusive approaches already during the crisis. A clear example is provided by migrants who are overstaying beyond the time limits of their residence permits, due to the impossibility to return to the country of origin. The permits should be promptly extended to avoid regular migrants shifting unwittingly onto illegality” (OSCE 2020). The world community realizes that labour migrants may be both more affected by and vulnerable to the spread of virus, but migrants also play an important role in the response by working in critical sectors.

The fact of having such a large number of labour migrants may lead to random and even large-scale social changes in the country of origin. They can be expressed on a variety of platforms, from public mood to changes in civic collective behaviour. For example, in the context of the pandemic, over 1,200 labour migrants were transferred to Armenia because there had no job and support in the host country. Later, the country they came from reopened the borders for labour migration, and this group is now demanding from the country of origin to return them to the host country. So, this is a small example of a “pendulum behaviour” – how they used the government support provided by the country of origin, but did not mind receiving support from the host country, too. The phenomenon can be referred to as dual belonging which loses the basic paradigm – homeland (the object of belonging) and getting transformed to “non-belonging”.

This is an important observation in the context of social change, as belonging is a necessary, yet not the only, condition for participation in social processes. These mainly take place through systemic changes, short-term demands, and disobedience, which implies a special approach to this social group. The latter can put the rest of the society at a disadvantage. The chain of the described social processes eventually leads to discriminatory treatment of migrant workers in society, which also affects their families and the social environment.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have attempted to show how integrating approaches of labour migration and transnational network can provide a useful analytical framework for better understanding the addressed problem.

Current approaches to labour migration studies show that the analy-

sis can be more multilateral if territorial boundaries between countries are ignored as a factor, and relations between migrants through the transnational prism are observed. The analyses should go beyond the accepted system and structural insights to include new actors and content.

In conclusion, the impact of labour migration on the country of origin is manifested in two, direct and indirect, forms. The direct manifestation is visible in the expression of short-term and measurable processes. They can be manifested in official reports, where the simple deviation of indices is already a consequence of the effect. And the indirect effect can be recorded in a slower and more transformed way. Migration tendencies can have some positive demographic, socio-economic consequences for the countries of origin if the return is carefully planned, prepared, implemented and supported. There must be a significant strengthening of relations between the countries, effective cooperation and solidarity, as well as joint responsibility for the right policy decision.

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