

Status of Implementation of the Global
Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular
Migration at National Level
for the IMRF

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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 (GCM) 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 participated in the first voluntary review of the GCM, which was conducted between 27 July and 25 August 2020, and is fully participating in reviewing the status of implementation of the GCM ahead of the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in May 2022. The Republic of Armenia is also in the process of applying

that may support GCM implementation in the future; 3) challenges faced; 4) resource requirements. 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 submission of the country's first National Voluntary Review in September 2020² although some references are made to developments before this date to contextualise said developments.

The National Voluntary Review for the Republic of Armenia has been structured following the indicative outline for Member States to review the status of implementation of the GCM at national level, in preparing for the IMRF, provided by the United Nations Network for Migration.

2. Policy and Enabling Environment

The migration policy of the Republic of Armenia has faced several tests and challenges in recent years. The challenges were conditioned not only by Covid-19 pandemic, but also by the war of aggression unleashed against Nagorno-Karabakh people by Azerbaijan, which threatened not only global peace and security, but also led to a regional humanitarian crisis, and mass displacement. Gross violations of human rights, including in armed conflicts, are among multiple and complex factors leading to forced displacement of people. As a result of this aggression more than 91.000 Armenians were displaced from their homes, 88 % of whom were women and children. These people had to leave their homes to escape mass atrocities. More than 40,000 people were deprived of their homes and property, vital infrastructure was destroyed, including schools and hospitals. Many of those people have become victims of repeated forced displacement, since they first had fled ethnic cleansing committed by Azerbaijan in the 1990s. During the recent aggression these people were displaced again, while still facing the consequences of the humanitarian crisis. The accommodation for displaced population remains among the most pressing issues.

Snap elections were held in June 2021 which led to the reinstatement of Nikol Pashinyan as a Prime Minister. Next to the above-mentioned challenges, international restrictions on movement in relations to the COVID-19 pandemic led to economic and social challenges, in particular for seasonal migrants from Armenia, their families and communities, as well as for migrant workers residing in the Republic of Armenia. The situation in Ukraine will likely also impact the Republic of Armenia, with an estimated half a million ethnic Armenians in Ukraine, and more than two million in the Russian Federation. While these challenges have clear impacts on efforts to implement the commitments of the GCM in the Republic of Armenia, they also create opportunities to further develop and refine the approach to migration policy, as this report documents. Before reviewing the GCM objectives in turn, the remainder of this section presents a brief overview of the current policy environment.

² <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/resources/armenia-gcm-voluntary-national-report-regional-review-europe-and-north-america>

The main Government body in charge of migration-related policy in the Republic of Armenia is the Migration Service of Armenia, which continues to operate within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures. Planned government reforms that would have seen the Migration Service move to a new Ministry of Interior in 2021 have faced delays owing to the war ~~and the~~ ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, plans to create the new Ministry of Interior were approved by the Government in April 2021. This will see the Migration Service and the Police Passport and Visa Department brought under the same ministry. The Government have approved plans to have at least 50 percent of the staff for the new Ministry hired by 2023, but many other aspects of the reform are still to be determined. Many other agencies are also involved in migration-related issues such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Consular Department; The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues; the National Security Service (NSS), particularly the Border Guard troops; the Police; Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Health,;

A draft version of the revised Migration Concept was reviewed during the first NVR¹¹ to assess its alignment with the principles and objectives of the GCM. In the process of conducting this second review exercise, the finalised Migration Concept was again assessed (see Annex 1). The concept is well aligned to the objectives of the GCM and a number of other international commitments:

‘This Conceptual framework shall contribute to delivering on Armenia’s international commitments assumed under the agreements between Armenia and the European Union on visa facilitation, on readmission of persons residing without authorization; within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol on the status of refugees¹²’.

While the nine strategic goals of the concept have remained largely the same, the revised concept expands the scope of ambition with regards to the strengthening of migration management in Armenia line with the GCM. Some notable changes include:

- Stronger emphasis on gender-equality.
- More focus on evidence-based policy, including through improving evaluation mechanisms and ensuring adequate resources for implementation.
- More specific objectives relating to increasing the impact of migration on sustainable human development.
- Particularly in the context of the increased number of displaced persons, a more concrete approach to increasing the level of preparedness to respond to migration crises.

The conceptual framework will be the basis through which four programmes will be developed. Each programme will be approved by Resolution of the Government, and will contain “an evidence-based, needs-based and gender sensitive action plan¹³” and an evaluation strategy. The programmes include the following:

- 1) Regulation of integration and reintegration issues (submitted to government for approval in December 2021).
- 2) Management of migration flows (drafting will begin after institutional reforms).
- 3) Emergency management of massive inflows of forced migrants (draft currently with stakeholders for comments, due to be submitted to the government at the end of March 2022).
- 4) Stimulation of repatriations (drafting will begin after the approval of the Law on Repatriation).

¹¹ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/resources/armenia-gcm-voluntary->

ArmStat website¹⁷. On the site, data is available on the ‘percentage of returned migrants who undertook paid work during the last 7 days’ (10.7.2.a) (2015-2018) and the ‘proportion of individual asylum applications granted’ (10.7.2.b) (2015-2019). 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 w

Source: Migration Service

Objective 2

Cards for the tender dossier in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards²⁴. The Government of the Republic of Armenia also provides citizens of Armenian with return certificates to facilitate their return to the country (See Objective 21 Return, Readmission and Reintegration for more information).

Objective 5 Availability and Flexibility of Legal Pathways

While the State Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has issued work permits since 2018, a Law adopted in 2021 and Government Decree²⁵ adopted in December 2021 saw this responsibility transferred to the Migration Service. The transfer was accompanied by the development of a new system to manage the issuance of work permits. The Work Permit system²⁶ seeks to establish a transparent process for immigrants seeking to live and work in the Republic of Armenia. In the past, a migrant worker would have to first receive a work permit before applying to the Passport and Visa Department of the Policy for their residence permit. The new system integrates these functions with a view to enhancing interagency cooperation. The system was presented and discussed at a number of multistakeholder meetings, including with employers, to already anticipate potential implementation challenges prior to its launch on 1 January 2022²⁷. Over time it is expected to make the procedure more straightforward for all parties involved and improve the availability of data on immigration to the Republic of Armenia (see Objective 1 Data and Evidence).

At the regional level, the Republic of Armenia became part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) since 2015. The EEU allows the free movement of goods, services, capital,

Objective 6 Fair and Ethical Recruitment/Decent Work

The Government of the Republic of Armenia has recognised the important of fair and ethical recruitment in its Migration Conceptual Framework including the goal of “strengthening supervision over private employment agencies³⁰” although no concrete actions have been taken in

Exploitation is a body comprised of the senior officials of stakeholder state bodies. The Council is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and meets regularly to set policy directions. The Commission on Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation is the sole body vested with the authority to recognize a person as a victim.

Objective 11: Border Management

In recent years, the Government has undertaken a process of modernizing the country's border crossing points. In our last NVR, we reported on the modernization of the three border crossing points with Georgia in the North and with Iran in the south of the country funded through loans from the European Investment Bank, a grant from the EU, and technical support from UNDP and ICMPD. The further development of border management will be supported by the UN Country Team in Armenia. Output 6.4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Armenia (2021-2025) reads as follows: 'migration managed more humanely and orderly with enhanced regional connectivity'. The UN agencies assigned to this output are IOM, UNDP and UNODC, and the means of verification is 'the number of initiatives to promote connectivity and border management' with a baseline of three initiatives (2020) and a target of five by 2025. Next to this, UNHCR has also supported effective border management through retaining the services of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) to conduct regular and systematic monitoring of six border points. The Migration Service and the Human Rights Defender's office also worked together with UNHCR and ARCS to provide training for Border Guards on refugee law, practice, and procedures. IOM has also provided support to building the capacity of Border Guards by assisting in the development of a national training curricula which is in line with the European Union Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding, and mainstreams gender equality topics³⁹.

Objective 12 Certainty and Predictability in Migration Procedures

Relevant development relating to certainty and predictability in migration procedures have been reported under Objective 5 Availability and Flexibility of Legal Pathways and

Objective 11: Border Management. Overall it is anticipated that the planned institutional reforms and policy developments will support this objective. The digitalisation of these processes will also further support this.

³⁹ United Nations Armenia (2021) UN Country Team in Armenia: Country Results Report 2020, p.48.

Objective 13

Armenia by supporting the update of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to allow better data, particularly on displaced children; provided electronic devices to support online learning and other school supplies, supported the expansion of classroom space in ten schools with the largest population of children in refugee-like situations, and provided targeted educational support and remedial classes. UNICEF also created ten pediatric mobile teams who were able to reach more than 10,000 children in refugee-like situation and from host communities. Support has also been provided to increase the capacity of the social service workforce (SSW) in the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Around 12,000 displaced and host community children have been the beneficiaries of such support⁴⁶. UNICEF Armenia also supplemented the cash support provided by the Government. Five thousand families received USD65 per child to “ensure access to basic services and address also the financial concerns of families in refugee-like situation with children⁴⁷”. In late 2021, the programme was repeated – this time with two payments of USD65, to families with children still residing in the country. During the pandemic, migrants residing in the Republic of Armenia were able to access free vaccinations and COVID tests.

Objective 16 Inclusion

Recent years have seen increasing immigration to the Republic of Armenia. Accordingly, the Government began the process of elaborating an integration policy in 2016⁴⁸ 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’. GIZ has assisted in development of the document by hiring two local and one international experts. 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 cultivating an accepting environment.

Objective 17 Discrimination/Public Discourse

As reported by the UNCT: “The RA Constitution provides general provision on prohibition of discrimination. However, there is no stand-alone law on non-discrimination in accordance with article1 and 2 (b) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) nor are there comprehensive legislation to provide legal safeguards to the

⁴⁶ Information provided by UNICEF

⁴⁷ Personal correspondence with UNICEF Armenia

⁴⁸ 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’

victims of discrimination. Since 2017 the Ministry of Justice started development of the draft law on “Ensuring Equality before the Law”, which has gone through international expert review and public consultations with the civil society organisations. Adoption of the law is a key to ensure equal treatment of vulnerable groups in line with Armenia’s international commitments in the field. Societal discrimination (specifically against LGBTI) and hate speech remains problematic and not sufficiently addressed⁴⁹”.

Objective 18 Skills Development/Recognition

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is currently negotiating a migration agreement with the United Arab Emirates which would focus on skills development in the informatics sector. Participants would train in the Republic of Armenia, travel to the UAE to work temporarily, and the return to work. Similar discussions are ongoing with Austria.

Objective 19 Diaspora

With an estimated diaspora of ethnic Armenians estimated at eight to ten million (approximately three times the current population of the country), the importance of the diaspora to Armenia requires little further elaboration. Mass repatriation of the diaspora is a strategic priority of the Government of the Republic of Armenia to address demographic challenges. The goal is to grow the population of the country to five million (population in 2021 was 2.96 million⁵⁰) by 2050.

At the time of first NVR, we reported that a Law on Repatriation, which will provide a clear definition of a repatriate, and which was developed and supported by a multi-stakeholder Working Group was due to enter parliament in the fall of 2020. However, primarily due to the war, this process remains ongoing, with hopes of the law being approved at some point in 2022. Following its adoption, the envisaged programme on repatriation (outlined in section 2 of this report) will be drafted. A legal study was also commissioned by the High Commissioners office to identify laws and practices that present hindrances to the diaspora, and accordingly suggestions for other legislative reforms have been proposed to the Prime Minister. These include, for example, proving Armenian ethnicity through the provision of a baptism certificate. However, particularly for ethnic Armenians from countries such as Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, it can be challenging to obtain such documents. Another challenge relates to bureaucratic customs procedures. To address this challenge amendments of the related legislation were initiated in the Parliament.

Several actions have been undertaken to support objective 19 of the GCM. For example, 22 young adults were appointed as Diaspora Youth Ambassadors in 22 countries in September 2021. A

⁴⁹ United Nations Armenia (2020) UN Common Country Analysis for the Cooperation Framework and the 2030 Agenda: Republic of Armenia

⁵⁰ Statistical Committee of the republic Of Armenia (ARMSTAT) (2021) The Demographic Handbook of Armenia 2021

Between 2014 and 2020

building activities designed for the reintegration case managers of the Migration Service is currently being implemented.

Thro

deepen the cooperation between different organizations providing reintegration support to Armenian citizens returning to the country. NGOs, such as CARITAS, speak highly of the Forum.

Another important project on the “EU for IMPACT Armenia EU for Increasing Migrants’ Potential to Act for development of Armenia” (**EU4IMPACT**) aims to contribute the empowerment of Armenian labour migrants, returnees, and family members through mobilizing remittances and investing in local development and job creation in Armenia. Applicants shall be ready and agree to make their own investment in the amount equal to the requested grant. Duration of the project is 48 months (2020-2024).

The project will provide from 2000 to 10000 Euro grants for business establishment as well as help to acquire required knowledge and skills for proper, competent and professional business management. More than 120 applications were received and processed by the Project, all eligible applicants were accepted for initial trainings. After a certain shortlisting, remaining applicants will be accepted to the IRIS Academy and undergo the principal online business training.

Objective 22 Portability of Social Security

There is nothing significant to report under this objective.

Objective 23 Strengthen International Cooperation

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, including through the sharing of knowledge and experience. The Government will send a delegation to the International Migration Review Forum in May 2022 and stands ready to participate in any other further national review exercises. Next to preparing an application to join the Champion Country Initiative⁶³, the Government of the Republic of Armenia is also preparing practices to submit to the UN Network on Migration’s Repository of Practices⁶⁴: 1) iGorts; 2) the government programme for returnees; 3) the readmission case management system.

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 this support will continue to be important in the future. The Government appreciates the initiative of the Resident Coordinator to establish the UN Migration Network in Armenia. The

⁶³ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/champion-countries>

⁶⁴ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/hub/repository-of-practices/about>

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Armenia (2021-2025)⁶⁵ recognises the significance of migration to Armenia. SDG 10.7 is one of the 48 targets covered by the Cooperation Framework. Furthermore, safe, orderly, and regular migration is identified as one of the 11 desired changes/impacts and diaspora engagement is recognised as an enabler. Migration is recognised as a 360-degree phenomenon with attention placed on:

- 1) The drivers of migration (poverty, unemployment and lack of decent work opportunities including adequate social protection system, a lack of social inclusion, and climate related factors).
- 2) The vulnerabilities faced by migrants and their families and communities (including economic distress caused by reduced remittance income, and high HIV-infection rates, and with a gender focus).
- 3) The role of the Armenian diaspora as a key actor that can contribute to achieving sustainable development (including through involvement in the design and implementation of social protection programmes and green and sustainable economic initiatives (both financially and through knowledge exchange), and investment more generally).
- 4) The importance of migration governance to good governance including through ‘strengthening border management institutions to foster cross border cooperation, trade and mobility’ (p51) and through ensuring a whole of government and whole of society approach to the governance of migration.

The upcoming institutional reforms whereby the Migration and Citizenship Service will become one arm of the new Ministry of Interior will require significant resources. With the new functions that the Migration and Citizenship 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. The same is true for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs with respect to the social functions relating to migrants that they will receive.

Resources are also required to ensure the sustainability of existing projects, programmes, and initiatives. For example, the ‘State Program of Primary Support to the Reintegration of Citizens Returning to the Republic of Armenia (including forced returnees)’ was able to provide support to 66 persons between January and September 2021, although ideally would be further expanded, given the capacity of the Migration Service is enhanced to allow it to do so. Budget allocations to the process of fully rolling out biometric passports will also be required. The hosting institutions of iGorts participants should also consider the long-term financing of participants that they would like to retain. 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.

Covid-19 pandemic also pushed to accelerate the digitalization of migration management systems

5. Next steps

All policy documents and strategies are in line with the objectives of GCM. Its principles and objectives are well integrated into Armenia's policy and practice, and this will continue in the future as the four programmes underpinning the Migration Concept are further elaborated, and institutional reforms implemented.

Accordingly, as the report has highlighted, several developments will be implemented in the coming months and years that will further contribute to implementing the principles and objectives of the GCM in the Republic of Armenia. Institutionally, the integration of the Migration and Citizenship

		Improving the existing regulation of employment of foreign nationals in Armenia	6, 7, 10
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		Managing restrictions of international movement	5
		Expanding international cooperation around crisis management of mass influx	23
		Allocation of sustainable finances	7
8	<i>Strengthening international and domestic cooperation in the areas of migration management</i>	Expanding regional and global cooperation	23
		Closer bilateral cooperation	23
		Expanding cooperation with public administration structures	12
		Strengthening participation of international organisations and civil society structures of the Republic of Armenia	23
		Raising Armenia's role of Armenia within international platforms	23
9	<i>Increasing the level of coordination, uniformity, and effectiveness in the area of Migration Management</i>	Creation of institutional foundations for comprehensive management of migration	12