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SURVEY OF DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES IN ARMENIA

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Abstract

In this article we analyze the causes of the demographic crisis in Armenia. The primary goal of our study was to analyze the current stage of the demographic transition in Armenia. We drew on the results of demographic studies, official statistics and sociological studies of the migratory and demographic behavior of the Armenian population. We provide a detailed description of the current stage of the demographic transition, as well as the analysis of potential trends and scenarios for overcoming the crisis in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Armenian demography, migration, depopulation, repatriation

Introduction

Demography today is a critical issue for many countries, including Armenia. Globally, the world's population is growing steadily, but in a number of countries, there are clear signs of depopulation. Population changes, demographic structure, and labor migration have always been significant for Armenia. Since the second half of the last century, the country has experienced a labor surplus, leading to an annual outflow of labor and skilled personnel or so-called "brain drain" during the Soviet times¹.

Armenian scientists focused primarily on the causes and consequences of population decline, employment, and labor force issues. They also addressed issues of national and state security in light of the deteriorating demographic situation. They also focused on the dynamics of births and deaths, infant mortality rates, and the increasing age of marriage among the younger generation. In the post-Soviet period, the development of sociology and applied research led to the systematic study of migration processes and the demographic problems of aging and depopulation. Among them, the monographs by Poghosyan G.A., Arakelyan I.A., Osipov V.G. «Migration and Depopulation in Armenia» (2017); Manukyan S. «Stages of the Demographic Transition in Armenia» (2019); Svarants A.A. «Demographic Security of the Armenian State and the Problem of Repatriation of Armenians» (2019); Mikael Malkhasyan, Armen Khachikyan, Manuk Malkhasyan

¹ The sociological survey was conducted in the framework of the thematic project, funded by Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia (code 21AG-6C041).

«The Current Stage of the Demographic Transition in the Republic of Armenia» (2023); Tavadyan A. «Demographic Crisis: 2 Million Armenians in Armenia by 2100» (2024) and others. A number of studies have attempted to predict the development of processes in the future.

Theoretical overview

The reproduction of population refers to the permanent renewal of population through the continuous replacement of one generation by another. Essentially, it is the interaction of fertility and mortality, the intensity of which is determined by significant socioeconomic, political, and ethnocultural factors. Population decline in European countries until the last quarter of the XX century was observed only in isolated cases: the plague epidemic in Europe, various wars, World War I, World War II, and others. However, these events differed significantly from the causes and nature of the demographic crisis in European countries at the end of the XX century. Along with various social changes, a gradual decline in natural population growth is observed, and in the end of the last century, approximately 20 European countries recorded natural population decline.

At the beginning of XX century, the French scientist Adolphe Landry published a scientific article in which he outlined in the first time the characteristics of the demographic transition (Landry, Adolphe, 1909). Later he developed in more detail this concept in book on the demographic revolution (Landry, Adolphe, 1934). In 1929 the American demographer Warren Thompson developed an early version of the demographic transition in his article on population (Thompson, Warren S. 1929: 959-975). Following this, in 1936 the British demographer Alexander Carr-Saunders published his work on world population growth trends (Carr-Saunders, Alexander M. 1936). And in the 1940s and 1950s, the American demographer Frank W. Notestein developed a more systematic theory of the demographic transition. (Notestein, Frank W. 1945: 36-57). He provided a general explanation for the evolutionary trend in mortality, fertility, and growth rates as a society moves from one demographic regime to another. This was the essence of demographic transition theory. Since then, many other researchers have developed and refined this term, which was first coined by Frank W. Notestein. The author of demographic transition, Notestein was President of the Population Association of America (PAA) and one of the architects of modern demography. He studied with Walter Willcox, the "father of American demography." In subsequent years, extensive collections of demographic papers were published on population size and demographic change in different countries. (Kirk, Dudley 1996: 361-387). By 2009, the existence of a negative correlation between fertility and industrial development became one of the most widely accepted results in the social sciences. (Myrskylä, Mikko; Kohler, Hans-Peter; Billari, Francesco C. 2009: 741-743). The current stage of demographic processes many researchers characterize as the 4-rth stage of demographic transition. During this stage, simple population replacement is maintained at best, while at worst, the population begins to decline.

Peculiarities of demographic situation in Armenia

Armenia is currently at the IV stage of demographic transition. According to the demographic transition theory, the population of Armenia in 1960-1962 made the transition from the II to the III stage of the demographic transition, since the mortality rate then stabilized at a minimum level. (Manukyan S. 2019). Currently, a gradual transition to stage IV is underway, which, in terms of the age structure of the population and the fertility rate, began in 2002-2005 (Manukyan S. 2019). Demographers consider the characteristic features of stage IV to be an increase in the level of urbanization, changes in family structure, a decrease in the number of children to 1-2 children in the family, an aging population, an increase in the social inclusion of women, and a decrease in population growth below the level necessary for simple replacement. All these signs are present in Armenia today.

Current processes are occurring in the context of a demographic crisis, which in certain periods vent into a stage of natural population decline or demographic "winter" (Malkhasyan M. et al. 2023: 64-69). In the long-term perspective population decline may lead to the "compressed reproduction," in which the number of births may consistently fall below the number of deaths.

Since the 2000s, the Armenian authorities have implemented measures to improve demographic policy in order to positively impact the situation in the country. (Armenia Transformation Strategy 2050. 2020).

According to the 2001 census, de facto population of Armenia was 3.0 million people; according to the 2011 census – 2.87 million, and according to the 2022 census – 2.9 million. In fact, the demographic situation is unfavorable in terms of natural reproduction of population.

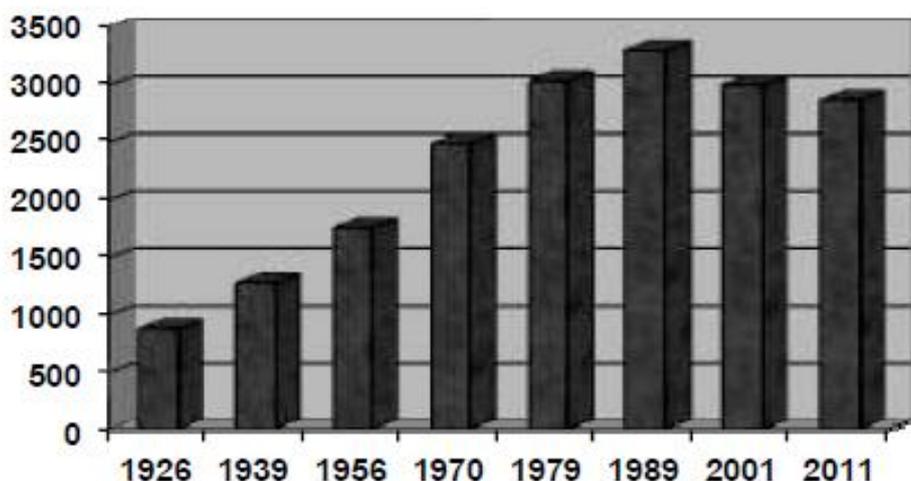


Chart 1. 1926-2011 population censuses in Armenia

Source: www.armstat.am

The total population had been gradually increasing since the beginning of the last century, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union it began to decline.

Table 1. Results of the population censuses in Armenia 1926-2022.
(available population)

Census	1926	1939*	1959	1970	1979	1989	2001	2011	2022
Population	878 929	1 282 338	1 763 048	2 491 873	3 037 259	3 304 776	3 213 011	3 018 854	2 689 438

Source: www.armstat.am

It should be noted that earlier, between 1831 and 1914, over a period of 83 years, Armenia's population increased by 852,500 people (Badalyan A. 1953: 49-71). After the formation in 1918 the Armenian Republic, according to the 1926 census, the population quadrupled from 878,929 to 3,304,776 in 1989 (over 60 years of Soviet rule). However, over the past 30 years, from 1991 to 2025, the population has decreased by half a million people.

Changes in demographics influence the social structure of society. According to the UN Population Division, the age and sex structure of Armenia in 1950 and 2025 is as follows. (Chart 2 and 3).

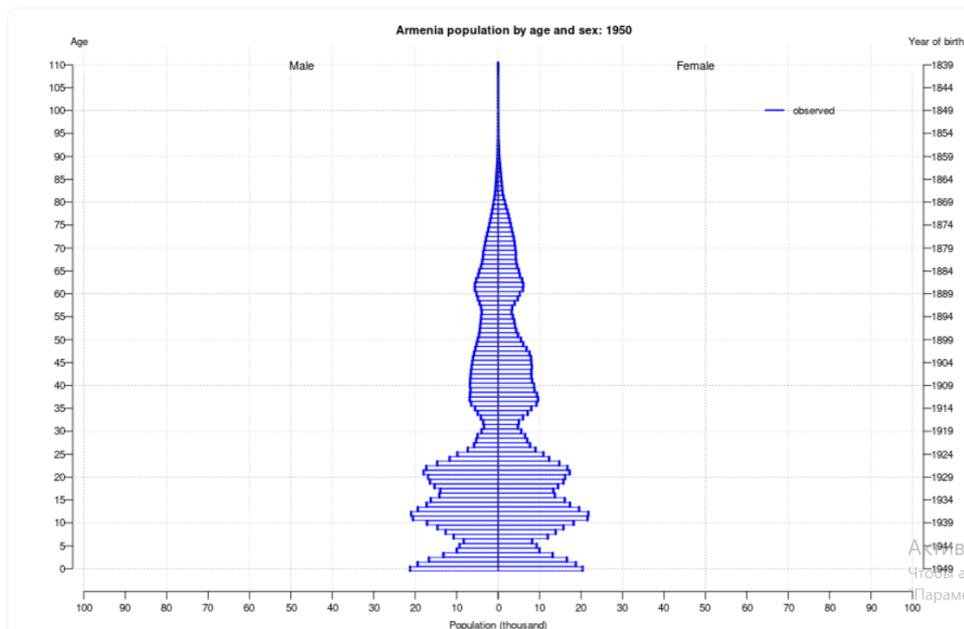


Chart 2. Age and sex structure of the population of Armenia in 1950.

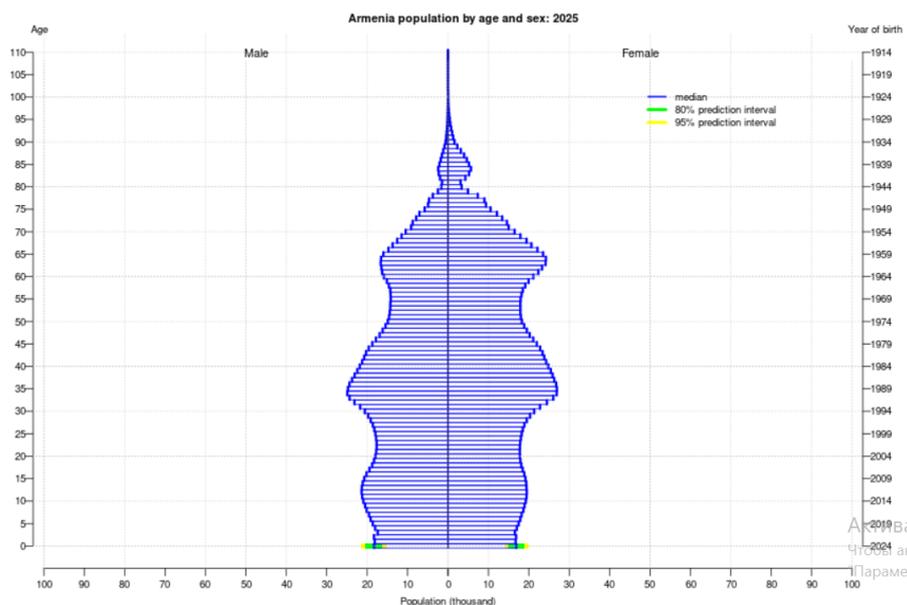


Chart 3. Age and sex structure of the population of Armenia in 2025.

Source: UN, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2024*.

<http://population.un.org/wp/p>

The charts show that, over the past 75 years, infant mortality has sharply declined and life expectancy has increased, while the overall population has not only stagnated, but continued to decline. Table 2 shows the time series of the republic's permanent population according to the results of three censuses. (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, 2025)

Between the two population censuses in 2001 and 2022 (Table 1), the population of Armenia decreased by half a million people (523,573). In general, the historical growth of the population of Armenia over the hundred years from 1897 to 1990 experienced several sharp “declines” due to the Armenian Genocide in 1915; the Second World War (250,000 victims); the catastrophic Spitak earthquake in 1988 (25,000 dead); the First Karabakh War in 1991-1994 (15,000 victims) and in 2020, during the Second Karabakh War (4,500 victims).

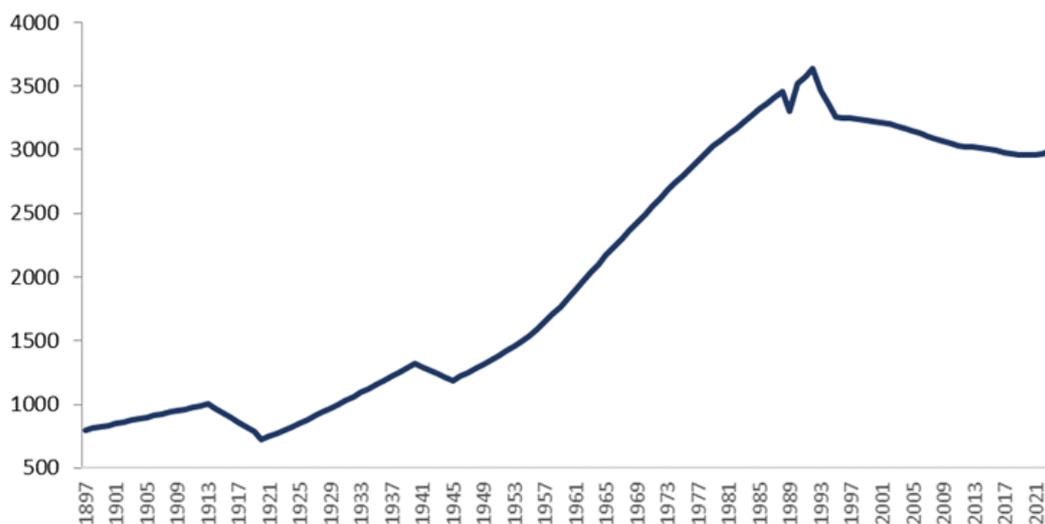


Chart 4. Population of Armenia in 1897-2021 (thousand people).

Calculated based on the official statistics of the Republic of Armenia: <https://www.armstat.am>

Since the 1990s, the republic's population has been steadily declining. Migration played a significant role in this population decline.

Birth and death rates of population

The primary indicator of a country's population dynamics is birth and mortality statistics.

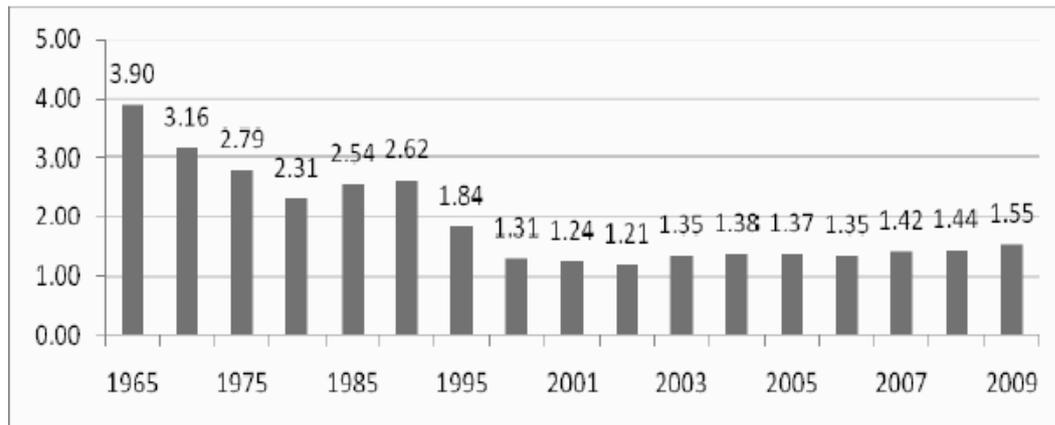


Chart 5. Dynamics of the birth rate in Armenia in 1965-2009.

Calculated based on the official statistics of the Republic of Armenia: <https://www.armstat.am>

The fertility rate per woman of childbearing age in Armenia fell from 3.9 in 1965 to 1.21 in 2002. However, it then rose again to 1.7 in 2024. In fact, the vast majority of Armenian families have one or two children, and some young families in have adopted the practice of so-called "child-free" family. The historically inherent, traditional multi-generational Armenian family has given way to the "nuclear" family, which consists of only two parents and one or two children.

(Poghosyan G. 2021). Accelerated urbanization in Armenia and the active involvement of women in the social and professional activities have played a significant role in the spread of the nuclear family model.

The overall picture of birth and death rates for more than 60 years (1960-2024) demonstrates a steady downward trend in the birth rate. If in the second half of the last century (since 1950) the average annual birth rate was about 76,000 newborns, then since the beginning of the 21st century (since 2000) it has decreased by almost half - to an average of 36,000 newborns. At the same time, annual death statistics have remained virtually unchanged since 1991. Short periods of significant increases in mortality were mainly due to various external causes: wars, epidemics, migration. Thus, the increase in mortality in 2019-2021 was due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, for the first time in history, Armenia recorded an increase in the number of deaths (36,433) in relation to the number of births (36,353), i.e. signs of population depopulation have appeared.

To calculate the natural population reproduction process, it is necessary to exclude the influence of migration outflows. Over the past twenty years (2001-2022), approximately half a million people have migrated from Armenia; an average of 26,500 people per year².

The observed trends in demographic processes are characterized by a low birth rate, typical for most European countries, as well as low mortality, which are the main characteristics of the current stage of demographic transition. In Armenia, the total fertility rate per woman in 2000-2008 was averaged 1.3-1.4 children; and in 2009-2019 - 1.5-1.6; and in 2020-2024 - 1.7. (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. Dynamic series. 2025). In general, a decrease in the birth rate has been observed in Armenia recently and this indicator is below the replacement level. Since 1993, the fertility rate has been below the critical value of 2.15. In this regard, this year is considered the beginning of the crisis state of natural growth. (Demographic Handbook of Armenia, 2022)

As long as those born during a period with a birth rate exceeding the level necessary for simple population replacement have the opportunity to reproduce, and mortality does not increase over a long period of time, a positive trend in natural increase is theoretically possible. This phenomenon is called "population impulse". (Kirk D., 1996: 361-87). The Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe went through this period four decades ago. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, the birth rate decreased by 8% in 2024 compared to 2023; in 2024, 33,648 children were born, and in 2023 - 36,590³. Global experience shows that with urbanization, development of healthcare, and involvement of women in active social activities, the birth rate decreases. According to UN forecast (United Nations, DESA, Population Division, 2024), in 151 countries of the world, the birth rate will fall below the level of simple population replacement, and by 2100 already in 183 countries of the world.

² https://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog_2024_3.pdf; https://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog_2024_5.pdf

³ <https://arka.am/news/society/v-armenii-za-2024-god-na-8-snizilas-rozhdaemost/> (accessed:08.09.2025).

A study conducted in Armenia by the United Nations Population Fund in 2025 (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, 2025) showed that in reality, a huge number of people are unable to create the kind of families they want. The problem lies not in the lack of desire, but in the lack of opportunity. The reasons include health and economic problems, as well as wars, epidemics, and the political situation. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents stated, that they would like to have three children, only 7% of households in Armenia have three or more children; about 16% have two children; about 15% have one child, and 60% of households have no children at all. (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, 2025). By the way, throughout the last century, the Armenian family was considered one of the strongest and most stable: for every 10 marriages, there were only 1-2 divorces. (Poghosyan. 2021).

Migration impact

The impact of migration, along with the declining birth rate, plays a significant role in the overall decline in population. As a result of internal migration, a huge portion of the republic's rural population has moved to cities. Today, two-thirds of the republic's population (68%) lives in the cities, and almost half of the urban population resides in the capital city, Yerevan.

Table 2. Dynamics of urban and rural population of Armenia, %

Year	Urban	Rural
1926	18.8	81.1
1939	28.6	71.4
1959	50.0	50.0
1970	59.4	40.5
1979	65.7	34.3
1989	67.8	32.2
2001	64.3	35.7
2011	63.3	36.7
2022	65.6	34.4
2023	63.8	36.2
2024	64.0	35.9

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Armenia (2024).

The urbanization process in Armenia is accelerating. For comparison, the global urban population in 2025 was average 57.2%, while in Armenia it was 66.9%. According to UN projections, by 2050, the global urban population will reach 69.6%, while in Armenia it will be 76.7%. (UN Population Division, 2024)

In addition to internal migration, external migration is also growing. While the external migration balance fluctuated around zero in 2001-2007, Armenia's annual negative migration balance amounted to nearly 30,000 people in 2010-2015 (Manukyan S. 2016: 7-17).

Table 3. Migration balance indicator 1990-2022 (thousand people)

Years	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Migration balance	+1.7	+4.4	-214.3	-138.6	-122.9	-35.6	-26.0	-27.8	-22.3	-17.6	-21.9
Years	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Migration balance	-15.1	-23.8	-27.2	-29.6	-30.3	-29.8	-33.4	-34.3	-38.4	-37.6	-28.5
Years	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Migration balance	-9.4	-24.4	-21.8	-25.9	-24.9	-24.0	-18.2	-15.4	+3.4	-4.1	+6.0

Calculated in the base of <https://www.armstat.am/am/?nid=13>

As a result, over the period 1990-2022, Armenia lost an average of 33,000 people annually. Positive migration balance indicators were only recorded in 1990-1991, 2020, and 2022. The positive balance in 2020 was most likely due to the return of Armenian labor migrants and the worldwide Armenian diaspora, due to the beginning of the Second Karabakh War. The positive balance in 2022 was due to the influx of relocated people from Russia, in connection with the outbreak of the War in Ukraine. At that time, tens of thousands of relocated people accepted Armenian citizenship, including the Armenians from Russia, who received second citizenship in their homeland. (Poghosyan G.A. Osadchaia G.I., 2024).

Future forecast

Прогнозы относительно численности населения Армении как правило, являются неутешительными. По прогнозам ООН, к 2030г. население Армении составит 2.81 млн. (Manukyan S. 2016: 7-17). По прогнозам ООН, численность постоянного населения Армения к 2050г. составит 2.816 млн. человек, а к 2100г. - 2.039 млн. (World Population Prospects, 2019).

Population forecasts for Armenia are generally disappointing. According to UN projections, by 2030, Armenia's population will be 2.81 million (Manukyan S. 2016: 7-17). According to UN projections, the permanent population of Armenia will be 2.816 million by 2050, and 2.039 million by 2100 (World Population Prospects, 2019).

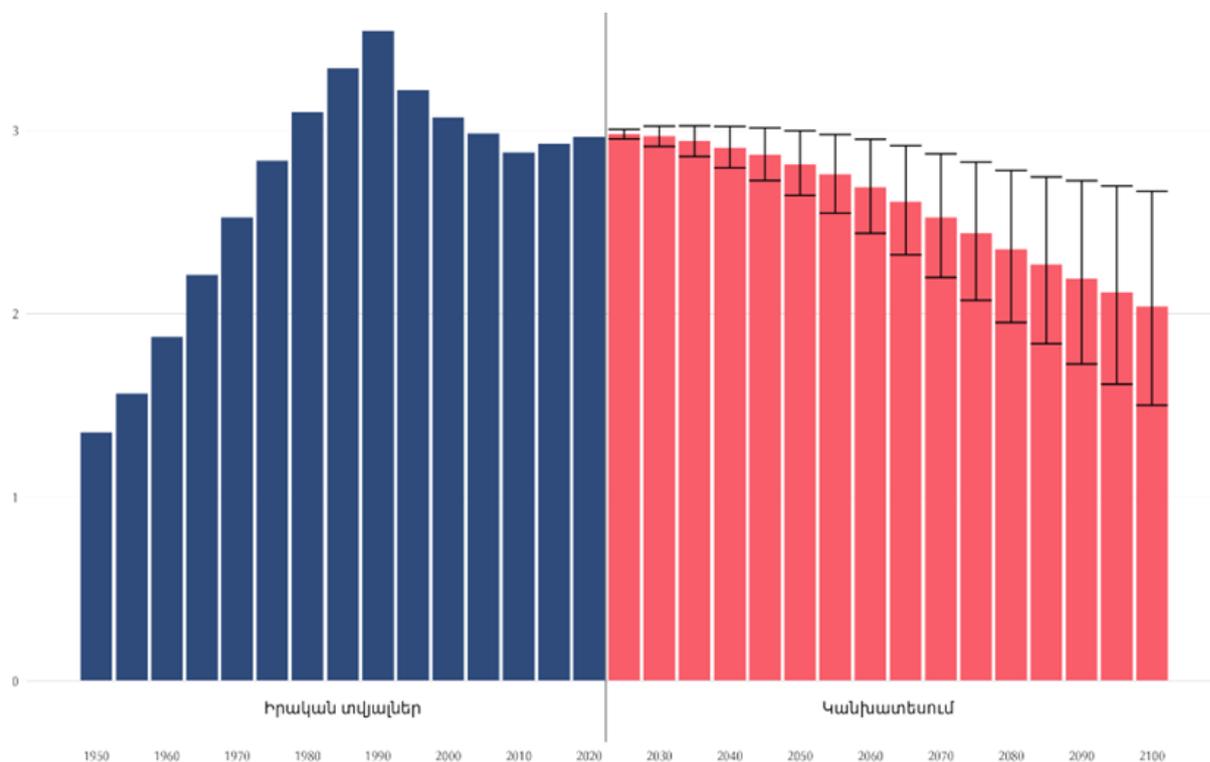


Chart 6. Population forecast for Armenia in 2100 (millions).

Source: tvyal.com; tavadyan.com. from *World Population Prospects 2019*.

The chart shows how the republic's population changed from 1950 to 2020 (blue), and how the population is projected to change for the period from 2030 to 2100 (red).

The approaches to addressing the republic's demographic problems are essentially limited to social security: benefits for vulnerable families, the one-time payments for the birth of a child, and other minor benefits. However, the crux of the problem is that the industrial economy, devastated by reforms, is gradually recovering as a raw materials appendage of developed countries, but is unable to provide our society with the necessary number of high-paying jobs. This situation will continue to fuel large-scale labor migration for a long time. Labor migrants are typically young people of working age. Many of them start families abroad or, having found good jobs there, transport their families there. As a result, their children are born and raised not in Armenia, but in the other countries.

Some statements have been made at the high governmental level, that Armenia's population should increase and reach five million by 2050. (The Vision Strategy of the Republic of Armenia until 2050). In 2020, the government adopted the «Armenia Transformation Strategy 2050», which outlined the long-term goals of the Armenian state in the areas of socio-economic, educational, and human development for the next 30 years. According to it, by 2050 Armenia's population should reach 5 million people, and the average life expectancy should exceed 90 years. However, just five years after the adoption of this ambitious strategy, it has become clear that it is unlikely to be realized.

Conclusion

Since the second part of last century, thousands of Armenian labor migrants have been leaving for the work, primarily in Russia. Sooner or later, they returned to the republic; this was seasonal labor migration. Large-scale migration from Armenia began in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, 30,000–35,000 people left the country annually. The problem became especially acute after the birth rate in the republic fell by half compared to the Soviet period. Over the years, the birth rate has gradually approached the mortality rate, signaling depopulation trends.

There are two main mechanisms for combating depopulation: increasing the birth rate and ensuring a mechanical influx of population. Stimulating the birth rate requires the implementation of very serious state programs and comprehensive measures, including financial and social support for large families, the development of a culture of large families in society, and much more. International experience shows that financial and material support alone is insufficient for young families. Furthermore, the financial support provided by the Armenian government to large families is not very extensive. Moreover, the total fertility rate in case of the second children is declining.

Therefore, ensuring a mechanical population influx is becoming increasingly important. The presence of a worldwide multi-million Armenian diaspora, scattered throughout the world due to historical circumstances, is of strategic importance here. While many European countries facing depopulation are resorting to attracting migrants from other countries, Armenia can exploit its greatest advantage and replenish its population through its extensive Armenian diaspora.

In 2020, we implemented a large-scale research project entitled "The Armenian Diaspora in Russia in the Context of Integration Processes in the Eurasian Economic Union." Sociological research was conducted among the Armenian migrants in Russia and their families living in Armenia (Integration vs. Repatriation. 2022). In both the Russian and Armenian studies, 7-10% of respondents expressed an intention to return home in the near future. Based on this, it can be assumed that the total repatriation potential of Armenian labor migrants in Russia is approximately 7-10%. When calculated based on their total number (approximately 2.5 million), the amounts to 175,000-250,000 people (Integration vs. Repatriation. 2022). This is, of course, a small number of potential repatriates, but it demonstrates a resource that can be increased under certain conditions. Approximately similar results regarding potential repatriates were obtained in sociological surveys of Armenian diaspora in Western countries. (Armenian Diaspora Survey 2019. 2020).

Let's remember that Armenia has experience organizing large-scale repatriation. This once again confirms that the republic has accumulated considerable experience in the socioeconomic adaptation of the large numbers of displaced persons. Consequently, organizing large-scale repatriation of Armenians from the vast diaspora over the course of a few years will not be as difficult as, dramatically

increasing the birth rate. Certainly, both mechanisms for countering growing depopulation are absolutely necessary and in demand.

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