

ARMENIAN REPATRIATES: TARGETING THE ISSUES OF INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Throughout the last decades, a significant number of Armenians have been choosing the path of repatriation. The purpose of this research project is to identify the issues of repatriates' integration in Armenia. In the scope of this research, an online survey, interviews, and observations have been done. Upon examination of the research findings, it became evident that the four main barriers to integration for Armenian repatriates are social isolation, linguistics barriers, financial difficulties, and a cultural shock that repatriates experience when they first visit Armenia seeking a permanent living. This research recommends adopting an innovative approach to resolve these barriers by creating a unified online platform to be used by both repatriates and locals to foster repatriate integration in Armenia.

Introduction

Throughout the last centuries, the Armenian nation has experienced a few major waves of immigration, but today many of Armenians living abroad decide to repatriate. Currently, the Armenian Diaspora community is comprised of about 11 million Armenians living in different parts of the world. The formation of the Armenian Diaspora began in the 19th century. By that time, Armenians had been living in Russian and Ottoman Empires. Armenians living in the Russian Empire tended to migrate to other countries of the Soviet Union. Eventually, by the end of the 19th century, Armenians were concentrated in the South Caucasian region. Meanwhile, Armenians began to migrate from the Ottoman Empire chasing better career opportunities abroad (Yeghiazaryan, 2003).

Furthermore, Armenia has encountered numerous calamities that created the three biggest immigration waves from Armenia. The first one was the earthquake of Spitak followed by the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the declaration of independence with an emerging severe economic crisis (Yeghiazaryan, 2003).

Today, many Armenians from the Armenian Diaspora choose to move to Armenia—to repatriate. The reasons and motivations behind their choice are different; some come to Armenia motivated by ideological beliefs, others simply escape the ongoing wars and unstable situations in the countries where they have been living. There is also an ongoing debate regarding the people coming to live in Armenia from the Middle East, especially Syria, whether they are refugees or repatriates. Hence, it is indeed essential to differentiate between a refugee and a repatriate for this research. On the other hand, it is also important to note that the current circumstances of Armenians somehow blur the definitions of a “refugee” and a “repatriate” because of the existing uncertainties regarding those migrants’ *de jure* and *de facto* statuses.

The term “repatriate” is used to describe a person, who has moved back to his/her native country. Meanwhile, “refugee” is a term used to describe a person, who has been forced to leave his country (Pocket Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). Considering the fact that many Syrian-Armenians have moved to Armenia because of the conflict in Syria, this term could certainly be used to describe them. However, most of them return to Armenia already having Armenian citizenship; so they cannot be considered as refugees anymore, but rather persons in a refugee-like situation. Secondly, those who return to Armenia, voluntarily decide to stay there rather than migrate to a third country, which once again shows that it would be more appropriate to call them “repatriates” rather than “refugees.” Further discussion of the term is provided in the literature review section.

Even though, as mentioned above, currently Armenia is experiencing the first influx of migrants since its independence, both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO)

of Armenia are taking steps towards fostering the integration of Armenian repatriates. In the Armenian constitution, there are already existing laws, regulations, and policies to support those who return to Armenia, and the NGOs are regularly organizing events, public relations campaigns, and projects aiming to target the same issue. Nonetheless, the problem still exists; non-local Armenians seem to be isolated and not fully integrated into social life of Armenia.

This research aims to discover and target the most current and problematic aspects of repatriate integration. This project is composed of two parts. First, using the means and techniques identified in the methodology section, the most common difficulties are identified. Secondly, reviewing the existing literature, analyzing the statistics and data presented by the Armenian government, and gathering the results of independently conducted interviews and surveys, several a new strategic approach is suggested to make the integration process of the repatriates smoother and faster.

Literature Review

Aiming to maximize the efficacy of this research, there should be no confusion or misunderstanding with regards to the terms used. For this purpose, consider the three following terms explained in the Glossary on Migration by International Organization for Migration:

Refugee - A person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (p.53).

Repatriation - The personal right of a refugee, prisoner of war or a civil detainee to return to his or her country of nationality under specific conditions laid down in various international instruments [...].The option of repatriation is bestowed upon the individual personally and not upon the detaining power. Repatriation also entails the obligation of the detaining power to release eligible persons (soldiers and civilians) and the duty of the country of origin to receive its own nationals. Repatriation as a term also applies to diplomatic envoys and international officials in time of international crisis (p. 55).

Return migration - The movement of a person returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or may not be voluntary. Return migration includes voluntary repatriation. (p. 56), (IOM, UN, 2004)

So, it becomes evident that the most relevant term to use to explain the influx of Armenians from the Armenian Diaspora for this or that reason (including war, severe economic crisis, or just a desire) can be defined by “repatriation.”

Moreover, it is essential to differentiate between “assimilation,” “integration” and “acculturation” practices. The latter terms were defined in the Glossary on Migration by International Organization for Migration as follows:

Acculturation - The progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (ideas, words, values, norms, behaviour, institutions) by persons, groups or classes of a given culture. The partial or total adaptation is caused by contacts and interactions between different cultures through migration and trade relations (p. 5).

Assimilation - Adaptation of one ethnic or social group – usually a minority – to another. Assimilation means the subsuming of language, traditions, values and behaviour or even

fundamental vital interests and an alteration in the feeling of belonging. Assimilation goes further than acculturation (p. 7).

Integration - The process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. The particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country; and the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors: immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities (p. 32) (IOM, UN, 2004).

Those Armenians who come back to Armenia from the Armenian Diaspora generally possess the same values, identity, and cultural heritage. The only difference between local (Eastern) Armenians and those from the Armenian Diaspora--Western Armenians--is the language that they use on a daily basis. Eastern and Western Armenians use two different branches of the Armenian language for everyday communication. Even though their bases are the same, there are notable differences with regards to grammar and pronunciation. These differences bring forward the hypothesis that language could be one of the barriers to integration for Armenian repatriates.

Following this, and taking into account that this research revolves around Armenians coming back to Armenia, the term assimilation is not quite applicable taking into account the fact that except for language differences, the values of both Western and Eastern Armenians are very similar. However, acknowledging that there are still minor distinctions between the two groups, acculturation is the most concise term to use to explain the integration process. Eventually, integration--being the most applicable term--should be used to ensure a smooth transition of repatriates' permanent residence from one country to another.

In the last century, the Republic of Armenia has experienced a gradual influx of migrants caused by quite distinct occurrences. According to Vardan Gevorgyan, an Armenian sociologist, four main waves of immigration could be separated (Gevorgyan, p. 14, 2016).

The start of the first wave is marked by the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1922, during which a great number of Armenians have migrated from Western Armenia to Eastern Armenia, which was later acknowledged as an organized repatriation process. The second wave of immigration to Armenia was caused by the Second World War, after which a few tens of thousands of Armenians have come back to Soviet Armenia. The next and third wave of migration is characterized by the annual influx of 12-14.000 ethnic Armenians to Armenia from Azerbaijan, Georgia, as well as Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan in 1960s-1970s. Last, but not least, the fourth wave of immigration was directly linked to the conflict of Artsakh as a result of which, in the years of 1988-1992, almost 420.000 refugees have moved to Armenia from the war zone (Gevorgyan, p. 14, 2016). Nevertheless, after Armenia's independence in 1992, Armenia had not experienced such major influx of migrants before 2010s.

Today, migration and social mobility are some of the most contemporary issues worldwide as well. People who change their place of living for one or another reason eventually encounter difficulties with regards to adjusting to the new changes in the environment and social circles where they will be living. In their research, Barrett and Mosca examine some of the difficulties that migrants face while integrating into a new environment. In this research they focus on challenges such as social isolation and loneliness. After conducting case studies, they came to a conclusion that "social isolation is a significant feature of the lives of both male and female return migrants and that the degree of social isolation is typically stronger for people who spent longer away or who have returned more recently" (p. 1673). This hypothesis might be applicable for the

repatriates of Armenia as well primarily because the returning people are Western Armenians, whose values, perceptions, and even language differ from Eastern Armenians, i. e. the people of Armenia. Therefore, these people are very prone to experiencing social isolation if they form communities and interact with others only via these communities (Barrett and Mosca, 2013).

To understand how these difficulties can be overcome most effectively, first of all, the main reasons for these difficulties should be identified. In her research, Kasbarian collected data via questionnaires and interviews with repatriates to examine how the meaning of the words “diaspora,” “return” and “homeland” vary. As a result, she concluded that the associations with these words differ and there is no single collective understanding of these words. This is why contradictions arise bringing forward the threat of isolation for repatriates' communities. The author, as a result, emphasized the necessity of having a fixed interpretation of the latter terms for both return migrants and the host country. Hence, she suggested using the term “sojourner” to avoid further difficulties in the process of integration (Kasbarian, 2009).

Most Armenian immigrants left their homelands because of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, which means they were living in Western Armenia. Even though for all these years they considered today's Armenia as their homeland, their notions about the life in Armenia and the reality may differ drastically. Therefore, perceiving the repatriates as “sojourners” and actors of change, who carry with them a distinct understanding of “home,” can eventually play a transitional role in the nation-building process (Kasbarian, 2009).

Nonetheless, the immigrants need to have a “platform” where they can practice their skills and knowledge and become actors of change. This “platform” may be the social networks that they can build in the new environment. Karooma examined the case of Rwandan refugees in Uganda to the repatriation practice of these refugees (2014). The author stressed the importance of social

networks for the refugees in the process of integrating them to the new communities that they have just stepped into. He suggested that the latter society has a share of responsibility to provide the newcomer with all the necessary opportunities of successfully becoming an integral part of the existing community (Karooma, 2014). Thus, it is assumed that these immigrants can play an essential role in the sustainability and development of the host country.

Van Houte's and Davids' research regarding the correlation between migration and development having a firm focus in particular on the role of NGO assistance and government policy herein, showed positive result in case of an appropriate approach. In the section titled "Return as a process of re-embeddedness" (2008) the authors discuss three dimensions of embeddedness including economic, psychosocial, and social. The study is concluded with a strong emphasis on the role of the social networks that the returnee has when talking about the benefits he/she can get from the social capital that is available for the general public. Therefore, taking into account the fact that there is a need for a different approach to the relation between migration and development both theoretically and policy-wise, there is also a need to develop new strategies and policies regarding social integration of immigrant (Van Houte, M., & Davids, T., 2008, p. 1427).

The need for newer approaches is also emphasized by Hammond, who calls upon the necessity of more proactive policies for the returning migrants (1999). She argues that the immigrants encounter "intense competition" with the locals for goods, services, education, and career opportunities. The case studies on repatriation in Ethiopia in 1993 and repatriation to Tigray in 1994-1997 show that there is a strong need to design new measures of repatriation, which would include elements of "construction, creativity, innovation, and improvisation," (p. 242).

Chew and Debowski developed an effective strategy for return migrant repatriation as well (2008). They suggested a model of repatriation practice as presented in the following model: Policy

Development and Review (Planning) => Repatriation Agreement and Implementation => Development and Implementation of Repatriation Programs => Repatriation Program Overview (Evaluation).

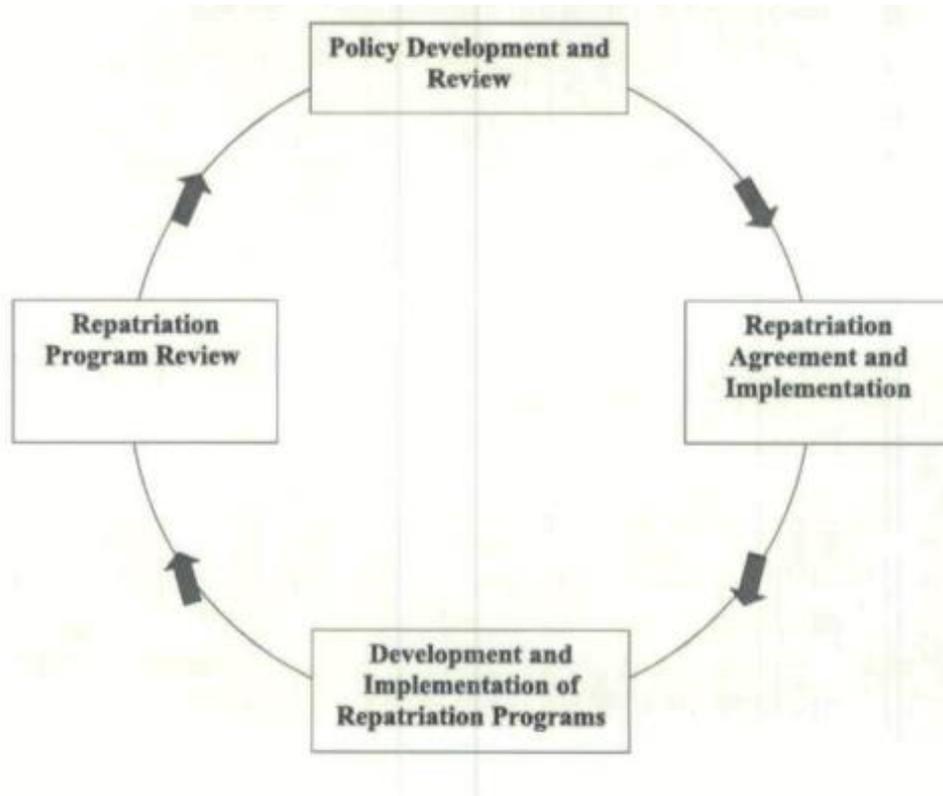


Figure 1: The Cyclic Process of Developing a Repatriation Strategy (p. 7)

If adopted in Armenia, this model will allow the Armenian government support the repatriates to integrate into the local community faster and easier. According to this model, the process of forming new policies should start with a review of the already existing measures. Then, it has to be examined whether the newly designed policy will meet the needs and requirements of the repatriates. This stage will determine whether the repatriates themselves will agree with these policies to be implemented. Later, these policies will be developed and implemented by both specialists and common people. The last stage of this model is the stage of evaluation, which will follow the implementation stage after a considerable period of time would have been passed. Studying the advantages and disadvantages, benefits and drawbacks of the given policy, the review stage will examine the effectiveness of the policies (Chew & Debowski, 2008)

Examining one of the significant challenges that repatriates are facing when they are moving to a new environment, employment opportunities, Lazarova, and Cerdin show that it is through the support of social programs that the repatriates should chase career opportunities. The proposed model for successful repatriate integration titled “Proposed Theoretical Framework” incorporates all factors that may influence the integration process. However, a normal lifestyle of the return migrants is not merely limited by the social and economic opportunities. Beusse examines different policy reasoning and legislation methods to come up with an effective form of support to the immigrants including basic services, integration support, and financial assistance. The section “Integration Support,” the author stresses the information availability and social networking as part of immigrant integration process (2009).

As long as the case of Armenian repatriates' integration is concerned, it has to be mentioned that several similar research projects have been conducted in the past years but with a different focus. In 2014, Aghasi Tadevosyan, a social anthropologist, published a book titled "Migration and Everyday Life: Movement Through Cultures and Practices," where he mainly discusses the everyday life and practices of return migrants in Armenia. At some point, his research also touches upon the everyday practices of Armenian repatriates. After several case studies and analyses, he concluded the book with certainty that despite the possible cultural and educational differences, both return migrants and repatriates currently play a significant role in both economic and civic initiatives. Moreover, the author believes that the impact of Armenians who come from foreign countries, especially of the Western world, on the civil society practices is already apparent and with time it will be even more evident (Tadevosyan, 2014, p. 157-161).

Additionally, in 2015, Repat Armenia has conducted similar research titled "The Experiences and Integration of Repatriates in Armenia: Obstacles and Opportunities," which was based on large-scale surveys, in-depth interviews, and suggestions from experts. The main problem of repatriate integration was caused by the poor socio-economic condition of Armenia, because of which finding a job with appropriate salary was a major challenge for repatriates (Repat Armenia, 2015).

As a result, after reviewing relevant literature, case studies, and other research projects, it becomes evident that in almost every case of immigration/repatriation the difficulties that the newcomers are encountering are the same. The literature review shows that the three main problems include social isolation, a difficulty in integrating to a new community, hardships in finding career opportunities. All of these problems can be solved in case of a proper approach. The new approach can be adopted using the model suggested by Chew and Debowski taking into

account the innovative and creative approach suggested by Hammond, which will ensure faster and more effective integration of immigrants/repatriates by fostering their integration into local social circles. Hence, this research aims to come up with a comprehensive and practical approach that would help to improve the immigrant integration policy of the Republic of Armenia.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

- What are the main difficulties that repatriates have been encountering in Armenia?
- What innovative approaches could be undertaken and implemented to target repatriate integration issues more effectively?
 - What role can online social media play in repatriation process?

The target of this research project is comprised of repatriates and return migrants who have moved to Armenia in the last 10 years. Certainly, there exist policies regarding the integration of immigrants. However, there still seems to be a room for improvement regarding the existing policies and projects directed towards improving the integration procedures. Therefore, after successfully identifying the most common difficulties that the repatriates are encountering in Armenia, some practical and applicable innovative approaches are suggested to adopt. Considering the fact that today the online social media is relatively accessible and has a wide range of outreach, a special focus was set on the utilizing online social media as one of the main tools of fostering integration.

Methodology

This research has been conducted in the following order:

- Identification of the main difficulties encountered by repatriates in Armenia
- Further review and examination of international scholarship and literature upon data collection
- Suggestion of practical inclinations by the end of the research

Data and Statistics

This research includes both quantitative and qualitative components. As for the quantitative part, I have reviewed the existing scholarship regarding the issue of return migration and repatriation. I have consulted official statistics, data, and census presented by official bodies of the Republic of Armenia. I have referred to the data published on the official websites visit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and the Ministry of Diaspora of Armenia to come up with valid, approved, and credible data. Acknowledging the necessity to include the perspective of an international organization in Armenia, representatives from International Organization for Migration (IOM) from UN Armenia were interviewed too. Moreover, I have visited NGOs that have already conducted similar research or projects to get acquainted with their results and possibly include those with appropriate references and acknowledgements. I have visited Migration Competence Center (MCC) of the Yerevan State University (YSU) because this research has a specific focus on migration issues. The two NGOs that I have consulted are Repat Armenia and Aleppo charitable NGO. Repat Armenia was chosen because it is a pioneer organization in Armenia which interacts with more than 500 repatriates annually. Same can be

said about Aleppo NGO; this NGO organizes projects and seminars as well as other charitable events to Armenians who have moved to Yerevan from the Armenian Diaspora in the Middle East. To capture a cohesive and complete picture of the current situation, projects and data of other NGOs were also consulted through their websites.

Surveys and Interviews

I have conducted my own surveys. I have prepared an online questionnaire that was sent out to repatriates and shared on different repatriate platforms. For some participants of survey of older age, the questions were asked orally and filled in the questionnaire manually upon receiving their answers.

The survey was comprised of five different sections. The first one asked basic questions about the repatriates' life and their background. The questions of the first section requested participants' age, gender, the country from where they have moved to Armenia, their current occupation, and the ways how they have found the school/university they are studying at or they job that they are working. The aim of receiving basic background information about the participants is to ensure that the answers of the upcoming section are not affected by irrelevant factors. (For example, students may not be satisfied with their job not because there are not enough job opportunities, but because they have not graduated yet.)

The second section, "Education and Employment," included Likert scale questions asking for repatriates' satisfaction with their school/university or job. Moreover, it asks how long it took them to find a job or an institution to continue their education. The section also included open-ended questions about challenges that repatriates have encountered in Armenia. Also, it asked whether repatriates have referred to any organizations chasing support to overcome those

challenges. The questions of this section seek to identify the main challenges that repatriates have been facing in Armenia and the role of organizations in supporting repatriates to overcome these challenges.

The third section, “Organizations,” asked repatriates to share the names of organizations that they have worked so far. The fourth section, “Challenges to Integration,” includes questions regarding two possible barriers to repatriate integration, namely social isolation and linguistic barriers. Even though the previous section also included similar questions aiming to discover the challenges that repatriates have been facing in Armenia, this section was comprised of specific questions related to social isolation and linguistic barriers to test the hypothesis that these two are the main challenges of integration for repatriates.

In addition to online surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with human resource officials of two youth organizations, namely Mr. Davit Manukyan from the European Youth Parliament (EYP) and Ms. Anna Jotyan from Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe /European Students' Forum/ (AEGEE). The interviewees were asked to evaluate the level of young repatriates' integration in the activities of these two youth organization. EYP and AEGEE Yerevan are two of the biggest youth NGOs in Armenia, and this is the primary reason why exactly the human resource officials of these organizations were interviewed.

In addition to these interviews, I have interviewed experts as well. During my visit to the Migration Competence Center at YSU, I have talked with Mr. Aram Vartikyan, the Director of the center. Later, I have interviewed Mr. Vartan Marashlyan, the Founding Director of Repat Armenia and Mr Sarkis Balkhian from Aleppo NGO. I have also talked to Mr. Armen Badiryan and Mrs. Karine Khojoyan from IOM UN Armenia.

Revision of Existing Policies, Literature, and Projects Fostering Repatriate Integration

I conducted a thorough review of both local and international scholarly works. During those reviews, I have focused on case studies of countries and communities that have already had the practice of accepting repatriates and effectively integrating them in their communities ensuring their not only social integration but also economic well-being. Moreover, I have considered theoretical models for policy proposal/review designed specifically for the issues of integration. These models were examined one by one and considered each regarding their practicality and applicability specifically for the Armenian reality.

The existing policies concerning immigrant integration were also reviewed cautiously and in a great detail. First, I reviewed and collected the existing policies, laws, regulations, and articles included in the Armenian constitution. Later, I consulted with Ms. Susanna Amirkhanyan, lawyer from GPartners law firm, to receive more valid and explicit explanations regarding the latter laws.

Moreover, a thorough research was conducted to find out what social projects are being undertaken, which, with the engagements of repatriated, aim at assisting them to easily adjust to the local community. I have visited Repat Armenia and Aleppo NGO, as well as International Office of Migration of the United Nations in Yerevan (IOM UN), and Migration Competence Center (MCC) of Yerevan State University (YSU) to get acquainted with the projects and events that these organizations undertake.

In addition, online social media platforms were researched to examine if they provide enough information for the repatriates to get acquainted with daily life in Armenia. A special attention was paid to the platforms that provide information regarding social events, employment opportunities, and useful facts to consider as the repatriates attempt to build their career and social life and to engage in the life of the local community.

Observations

Considering the fact that the integration of one social group into the larger community is also evident by mere observations, observational analysis was also conducted. While conducting the research, three visits were made to social events where representatives of both local communities and repatriates are participating. Before attending the events, I had consulted with the organizers to identify which pavilions belong to the repatriates and which belong to the local Armenians. In case the pre-event consultation was not possible, I simply interacted with those present and later conducted my observations accordingly. The observations helped to understand if those two groups are freely communicating with each other or they are isolated from each other forming separate clusters; and whether special attention is paid to the repatriate participants or they are perceived equally as other regular participants. The events that I have visited were:

1. Breath of The Syrian-Armenian Culture in Yerevan
2. Exhibition of Business Products Created by Women Entrepreneurs
3. Meet & Greet Event for Introducing Iravaban 24

These events took place in the time when this research was being conducted. All three events involved the active participation of repatriates. On the other hand, one of the research questions that was initially set for this project was to discover the role of PR in the process of repatriate integration. Relatively, the observations of events organized by different institutions were included in order figure out, depending on the differences of pre-event PR strategy adopted by a given institution, how successful the event was in terms of the involvement of both repatriate and local communities.

Research Findings & Analysis

An analysis of data provided by multiple sources shows that as of today there is no specific statistic regarding the number of Armenian repatriates. Instead, different NGOs who work with a more specific target group have collected their data, and they plan their future actions depending on that specific data.

Mr. Vartan Marashlyan, the co-founder and executive director of Repat Armenia NGO, noted that each year around 1000-1500 people permanently move to live in Armenia only from the United States of America, Canada, and Europe (Marashlyan, 2017). On top of this, according to statistics offered by RoA Ministry of Diaspora and published by UNHCR, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, approximately 22.000 Armenians left Syria, 16.000 of whom sought protection in Armenia (UNHCR, 2015, p. 1). Moreover, as Ms. Anahit Hovhaninsyan, the External Relations Associate of UNHCR mentions in the interview with ArmenPress, “as of 2015, 80% of those migrants have Armenian citizenship, 20% have a residency status, and 500-600 people have acquired the status of a refugee” (ArmenPress, 2015). Overall, different sources have generated different data regarding the number of repatriates in Armenia. On average, the number ranges from 10.000 to 15.000 for the last ten years. However, how many repatriates are there exactly, how many of the people in refugee-like situation end up repatriating, and how many of them will remain in Armenia in the future remain open.

In order to discover the issues of integration that the Armenian repatriates have been facing in the last years, they were asked to fill out an online questionnaire that comprised of multiple choice, open-ended, and Likert scale questions. 120 Repatriates participated in the survey. Taking

into account that the age of participants was different, a number of questions could be inapplicable for people of a certain age group, so the respondents were not required to answer all questions.

The majority of the survey participants were in the age gap of 19-40, but some students and retired individuals have also taken part in it. The age distribution of the respondents is represented in Figure 2 below.

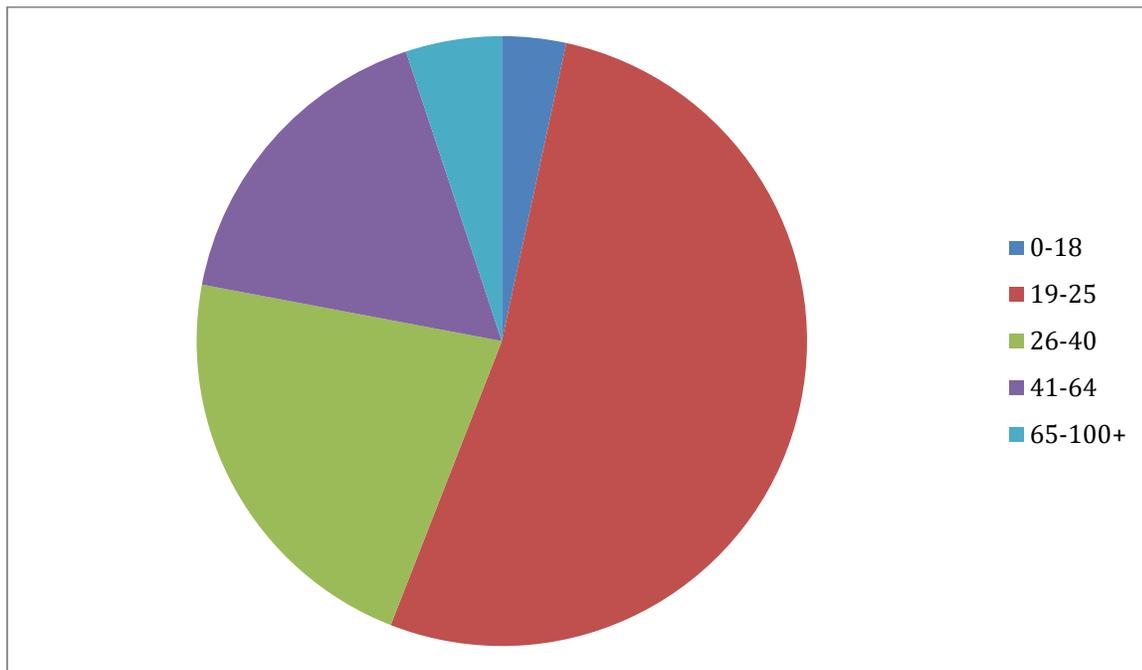


Figure 2: The Age Distribution of Respondents

This research does not aim at targeting a specific generation but rather a group of individuals which are at the same (or similar) stage in their life, and it is the reason why the age ranges are not equal. For example, the participants aged 0-18 are most probably school students, are those ages 65-100+ are retired. The age group of people from 26-64 is divided into two ranges—26-40 and 41-64—to differentiate those who are relatively young adults having just started their career from relatively

more established individuals who presumably have recorded a greater advancement in their personal and professional lives.

The participants of the survey have moved to Armenia from 14 different countries. This implies that the demography of respondents was quite diverse. This wide country distribution of repatriates maintains the credibility of the survey ensuring that the integration issues noted by the respondents are applicable not only to repatriates from a specific country but are challenges for repatriates in general. The list of countries from where the respondents have moved to Armenia is presented below in a bar graph (Figure 3.)

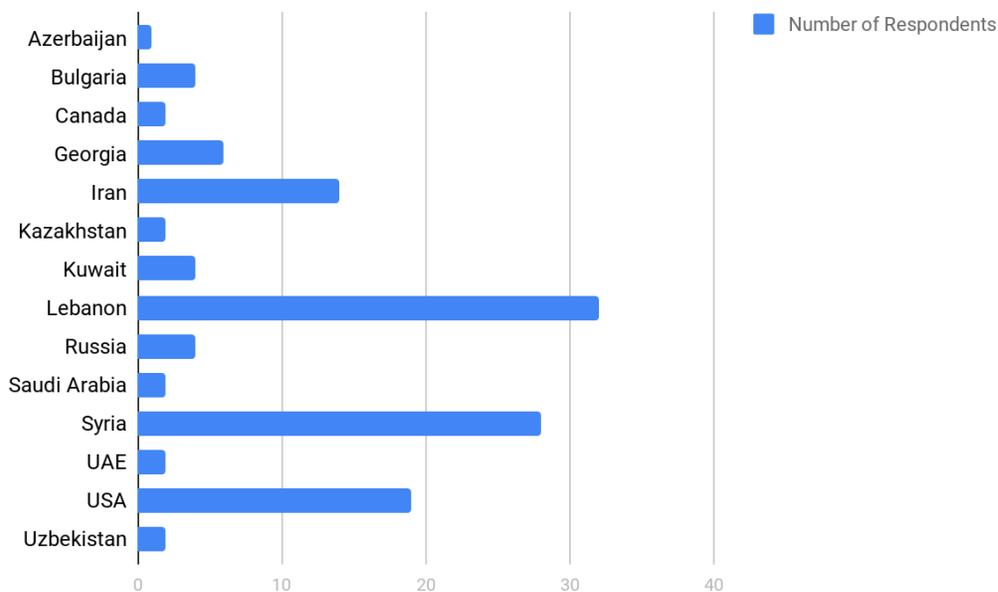


Figure 3: Country Distribution of Respondents

Most of the respondents were either students or employed individuals. Some others established their businesses in Armenia. Retired and self-employed repatriates were involved in the survey too. Those who were still acquiring education were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with their school/university in Armenia on the scale of 1-5 (1-least; 5-

most satisfied). It is evident that a bell-shaped distribution of responses was collected. Most of those still at school are generally satisfied with their education in Armenia. The results are summarized in a bar graph below (Figure 4).

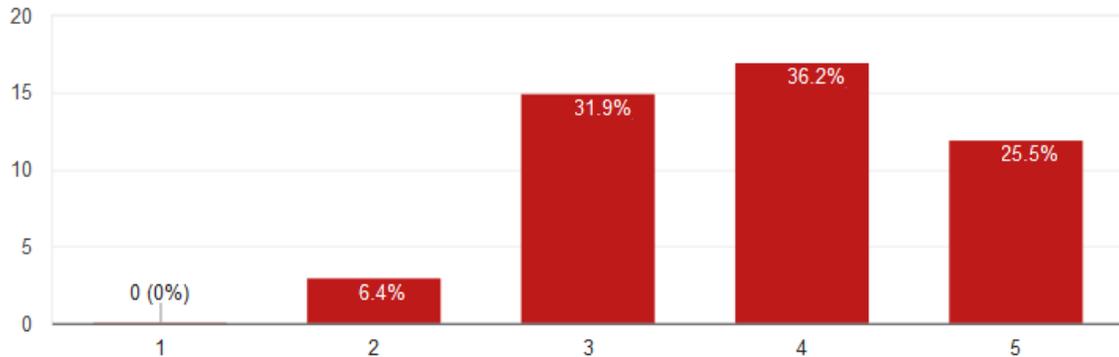


Figure 4: The Rate of Respondents' Satisfaction with School/University Experience

Those respondents who were employed were asked the same question about their job. They had to rate their satisfaction with their job on a similar Likert scale. Notably, many respondents expressed a negative rather than positive rate of satisfaction for this question. To figure out why is it so, I have conducted an examination of individual responses. It turns out that a vast majority of those rating 1 or 2 are studying along with their work and have not graduated yet. In contrast, those who have rated 3, 4 or 5 are older respondents.

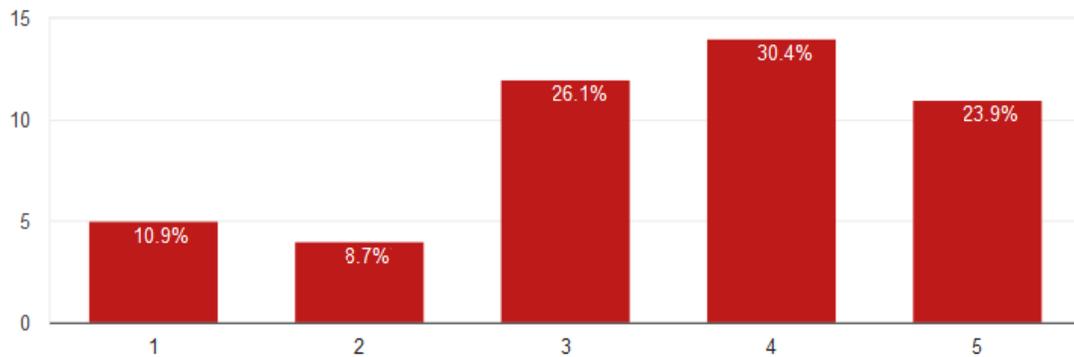


Figure 5: The Rate of Respondents' Satisfaction with Job Experience

The participants were also asked to share about the greatest challenges that they have encountered when they first moved to Armenia. This question was open-ended; the respondents shared different thoughts and stories about their integration experience. The responses were collected and coded into 5 categories depending on the issue that they have mentioned in their responses. The following 5 general categories were noted: language barriers (the Eastern Armenian or Russian languages), cultural differences, social isolation, job-related issues, and social support (lack of information, everyday needs such as transport, non-smoking areas, etc.) The main challenges to repatriates' integration in Armenia are summarized in Figure 6 below.

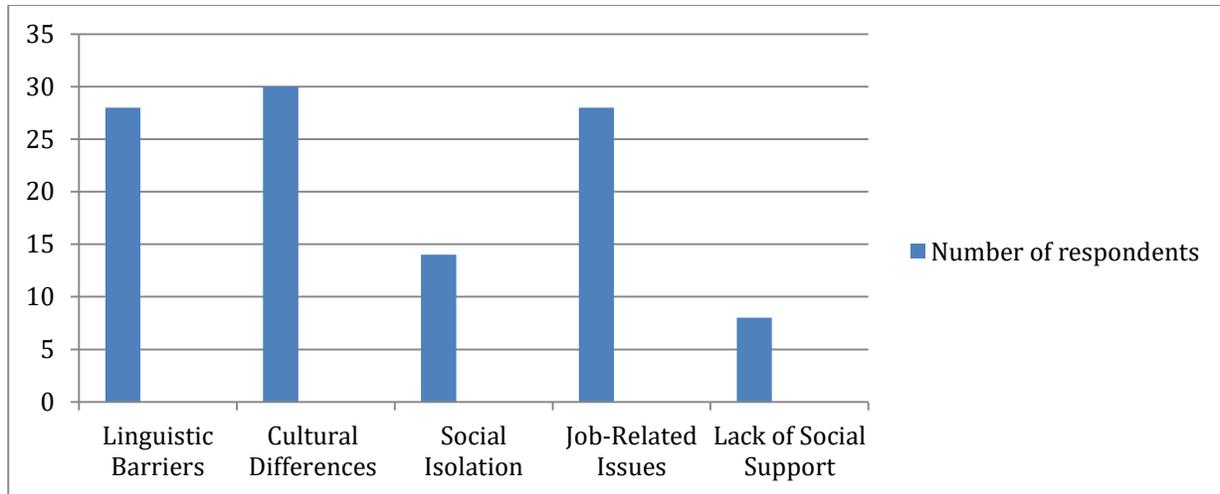


Figure 6: Main Challenges for Repatriates' Integration

Following this, the respondents were asked to share how they have overcome these challenges. Like the previous question, this one was an open-ended question too. So, the responses were divided into categories for this question as well. The four different ways how people solved the issues to integration were the following: with the help of friends or relatives, with the help of different organizations, by either visiting or working for the country where they came from, and by working on themselves to adjust to the new environment without anyone's support.

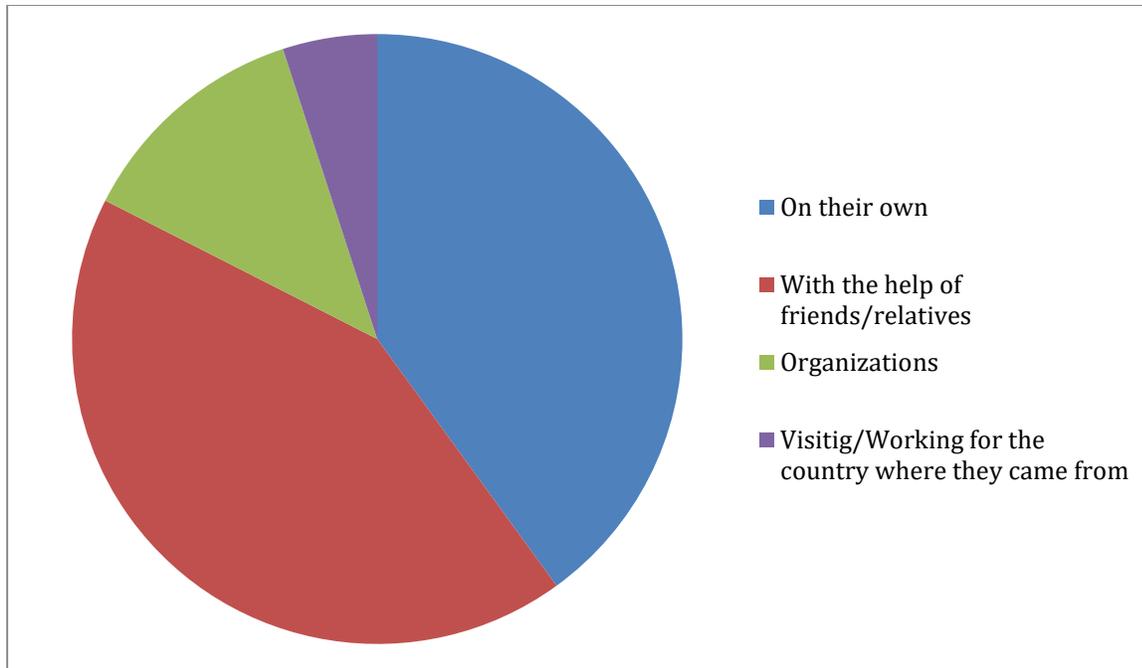


Figure 7: The Means How Respondents Overcame Barriers to Integration

In addition to surveys, some interviews with experts were conducted. The interviewees are people who work directly with repatriates and have a hands-on, practical experience regarding the barriers to integration that repatriates are facing in Armenia.

Mr. Aram Vartikyan, the director of the Migration Competence Center (MCC) of the Yerevan State University (YSU) stated that it is crucial to first of all clarify who are the Armenian repatriates. According to him, the status of people to have moved to Armenia in the recent years is a quite unique one--somewhere between a repatriate and a refugee. So, first and foremost, their status has to be explored in-depth to figure out in which criteria they fit the most and what are their needs. He also noted that security is one of the problems that repatriates are facing as newcomers to Armenia. This is a barrier that leads to social isolation. As a result of feeling left out of the community, they feel socially excluded and are obliged to create their own community. Nonetheless, the question is “do they really need to be integrated to the local community?”

“Armenian refugees coming from the Middle East are used to living in a community. This is how they have preserved their identity and Armenian-ness in arab countries after the Armenian Genocide when they stepped into a totally different culture. Possibly, it is due to the community that they have created in a foreign country that most of them became very successful there. Maybe in Armenia that would be the case, and living in a separated community would be an encouragement for them to work hard and reach success in Armenia,” said Mr. Vartikyan.

In addition to security, he mentioned the linguistic barrier. Stressing the importance of education in Armenia, he noted that in some instances the repatriates’ right to education might be violated due to the limited alternatives that they can find in Armenia. Last but not least, Mr. Vartikyan drew attention to the issue of job opportunities in Armenia. Not all repatriates are able to find a job that would secure an income to satisfy their needs for living in Armenia. Even the fact that they have to adjust to a totally new culture in the workplace can be viewed as a barrier for integration for them.

Mr. Vartan Marashlyan, the co-founder and executive director of Repat Armenia, noted the socio-economic conditions in Armenia as a burden to integration too. However, having worked with more than 500 repatriates every year, Mr. Marashlyan is quite positive about the job hunt in Armenia.

“Some repatriates, especially those from Western countries, are pioneers in some spheres. We have repatriates who have introduced innovations in winemaking, high-tech, education, design, restaurant, tourism, and many other industries.” said Mr. Marashlyan

While discussing the issues to repatriate integration in Armenia, Mr. Marashlyan listed 4 main problems. The first one being the small local market, he stated that for most of the cases good education could not guarantee the repatriate a good job in Armenia. One reason for this is that sometimes they have are specialized in professions that are not highly demanded in Armenia. Hence comes the second issue--the low salaries in Armenia. Even though it is possible to achieve career advancement, sometimes the repatriates have to start from comparably low incomes.

Moreover, Mr. Marashlyan mentioned that some (but not all) repatriates find language as a barrier to their integration. However, this issue is resolvable with time. On the other hand, referring to the lifestyle of repatriates in Armenia, he states that those coming from the countries of Middle East are more prone to social isolation compared to those coming from Western countries. The reason is that in the Middle East, Armenian tend to live in communities, while in Western countries they tend to network and communicate with the locals. As a result, repatriates from USA, Canada, and European countries generally find it easier to interact with locals and encounter the issue of social exclusion less compared to Armenians coming from Syria and Lebanon. The results of the survey, which was conducted in the scope of this research, support this statement, too. Those repatriates who have moved to Armenia from Western countries reported that they have experienced less difficulty with regards to networking and haven't encountered social isolation as such.

Last but not least, Mr. Marashlyan shared the repatriates' emotional link to Armenia as to their motherland. According to him, some repatriates come to Armenia with great ambitions and dreams without realizing that "Armenia is a real country" where they may face difficulties too. This comes from the education that they acquire abroad, in the Armenian Diaspora. To solve this issue, Mr. Marashlyan believes that creating networking opportunities where current and prospective repatriates can meet, exchange with experience, help each other, and share their perspectives and thoughts is one of the most effective ways for successful integration.

Mr. Armen Badiryan and Ms. Karine Khojoyan, the representatives from International Organization for Migration (IOM), pointed at a more general issue for the Armenian repatriates. Referring to the Migration Glossary of the United Nations (UN), they have put a clear differentiation between voluntary and involuntary repatriates. Following this, it becomes evident that the integration procedure is much easier for voluntary rather than involuntary repatriates who were somehow forced to leave their countries of residence and come back to Armenia. However, the United Nations offers programs specifically designed for them to help their integration procedure.

While talking about specific barriers to integration, Ms. Khojoyan listed 4 issues. Similar to previous interviewees, she mentioned the financial difficulties that repatriates are facing in Armenia. First and foremost, it originates from the socio-economic condition of Armenia. Secondly, the repatriates have to adapt to the work ethics of Armenia in order to be able to become successful in their business. Secondly, she noted the importance of preserving the western-armenian culture-more importantly the Western Armenian language. The children have no platform to practice it considering the fact that they use Eastern Armenian for their studies at school.

This is the third issue--the limited alternatives to school students. They face the threat of assimilation which means with time they will be deprived of most of the values that characterize Western Armenians. So, there is a need to at least include Western Armenian in the school curriculums for children to practice it in the classroom. Lastly, she also mentioned social isolation as a possible issue to integration. Here, the issue is not with how the repatriates feel in the new community but how the community accepts them.

Mr. Sarkis Balkhian from Aleppo NGO also listed these and similar issues as major drawbacks to the integration of repatriates to the local community. He extremely disagreed to call the people from Syria, who moved to Armenia to escape the war, repatriates because according to him, most of them would move to a third country if there was a chance.

As far as barriers to integration are concerned, he addressed the financial and educational issues on the first place. Working mostly with Armenians from Syria, he claimed that even though they receive some kind of financial support from the Ministry of Diaspora or individual donors, it is not enough to secure a satisfactory life in Armenia. Moreover, recalled the example of the Cilician school. It was opened in Armenia a couple of years ago for Armenians from Syria to give the students an opportunity to continue their education in the educational system that was established in the Armenian community of Syria. He stressed the importance of granting Syrian-Armenian students to continue learning Arabic and Western Armenian in the classroom. Even though he did not considered the Cilician school to be the perfect example for a school for Syrian-Armenian students, but at least it was an attempt to help the students to integrate to the local community with a greater ease.

Moreover, two human resource specialists of youth organizations were interviewed.

Mr. Davit Manukyan, the Human Resource officer and alumni coordinator of the European Youth Parliament NGO, stated that young repatriates are actively involved in the operations of the NGO. He also added that having a common heritage helps a lot to disregard some existing barriers to integration for the repatriates.

“The level of integration of repatriates differs depending on different groups of society, young people and university students have many things in common so the integration process is usually happening rather fast. I wouldn’t say that they are completely integrated since for example many Syrian Armenians who returned to their homeland interact with each other more frequently compared to locals, but that is understandable because there is so much connecting them, but overall I think the situation is improving drastically. I myself have many repatriate friends with whom we are in a very good terms and are spending time together on a regular basis,” said Mr. Manukyan.

Ms. Anna Jotyan, Human Resources coordination of AEGEE Yerevan, highlighted one of the issues to repatriate integration; “In some cases the effective communication may be hindered due to linguistic barriers, as well as the excessive caution they exhibit due to the lack of awareness of local manners and practices,” says Anna. She also added: “Generally, when repatriates manage to set up good relationships during the formal events, then they would happily step into the circle for the informal ones, but occasionally an additional “push” as a motivation or encouragement is needed to make them feel comfortable within the company of locals.” Meanwhile, Ms. Jotyan also noted that at AEGEE Yerevan, the language of written communication is English, and the members interact in English during official events, but in the oral interaction with local members, repatriates most often use a mix of English and Armenian.

Overall, the findings of the online surveys and the summaries of all the interviews suggest that there are generally similar issues of integration that the repatriates are facing in Armenia. One major difference that has to be noted is that despite the fact that all representatives of NGOs stated that they work with a great number of repatriates on an annual basis, yet most of those surveyed noted that they are not referring to any organizations to overcome the difficulties that they have been encountering in Armenia.

Examining the international practice of repatriate integration, a number of policy creation and revision methods have been discussed and reviewed in the scope of different academic works. Reading, comparing, and contrasting those, two of such methods will be used to suggest a new innovative way of approaching and successfully resolving the integration issues of Armenian repatriates. Those two works will be *Development and Return Migration: From Policy Panacea to Migrant Perspective Sustainability* by Van Houte, M., & Davids, T. (2008), and *Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management* by Chew, J., & Debowski, S. (2008).

As far as the existing policies regarding repatriation in Armenia are concerned, it has to be mentioned that there exists a policy act titled “On Repatriation” validated by Ms. Siranush Hakobyan, the Minister of Diaspora in RA, and Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, former Prime Minister of the RA. The policy is comprised of 18 different articles with corresponding sub-points tackling the procedures of recognizing a person as a repatriate, granting him/her support, and encouraging repatriation in general.

According to the 12th article of the policy, after the individual is recognized to be a repatriate by providing evidence to qualify all the necessary categories of being a repatriate, the Armenian government will support him/her in the following ways:

1. Provide temporary residence or financial support to rent a residence
2. Organize classes of Armenian language free of charge
3. Organize training sessions to provide appropriate professional certification
4. Provide special support to young and vulnerable families
5. Give the repatriates a right to a gratuitous use of land near the borders of RA with accordance to the policy defined by the RA government
6. Allocation of seats in the frame of state order in the universities of RA
7. Give the repatriates a right to health services with accordance to the RA law on health services for RA citizens.

The law has been put in practice starting March 1st, 2012, and no changes were made ever since.

Following this law, it is evidently a quite straight-forward and quick procedure to acquire a status of a repatriate in Armenia. Moreover, the repatriates in Armenia are given the choice of receiving a lot of support from the Armenian government as noted in all 7 sub-points of the 12th article of the abovementioned policy.

On the other hand, consultations with different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) show that NGOs also implement a number of projects with a purpose to foster repatriate integration in Armenia. Repat Armenia not only provides one-on-one consultations to the repatriates helping them find an appropriate employment, form their circle of friends, and become a part of the social community, but also organizes meet and greet sessions with current and prospective repatriates creating a networking and experience-sharing platform. One of such meet and greet sessions was chosen as an observation event for this research and is discussed later in the paper.

Another NGO, Aleppo, having narrowed down its scope of work to Armenians who have moved to Armenia from the Middle East, especially Syria, also has a number of projects that support the Armenian repatriates. Upon conducting a thorough research to determine what are the needs of the NGO's beneficiaries, they put together and implement a number of projects that aim to support the Armenians' well-being in Armenia. In cooperation with the Armenian government and other NGOs, Aleppo implements the following projects:

1. **Warm Winter** – providing winter clothing, food packages, and financial support to the most vulnerable families
2. **Host a Family** – finding benefactors willing to purchase modest apartments or identifies sponsors that already own apartments in Armenia and are willing to allocate them rent-free for a sustainable amount of time to vulnerable Syrians in Armenia
3. **Arevik Armenia Center** – previously operating in Aleppo, the center was reopened in Yerevan and provides physical and mental support and educational, psychiatric, and social services free of charge
4. **Save a Life** – aiming to provide financial assistance to Armenians seeking to leave Syria and settle in Armenia
5. **Adopt a Family** – allowing individual donors to sponsor vulnerable Syrian families in Armenia by providing monthly financial aid
6. **Socio-psychological Support** – providing socio-psychological support Syrians who have lost relatives, experiences trauma or suffered extensive material losses during the ongoing conflict
7. **Women Economic Empowerment (Traditional Needlework/Embroidery, Felting, Carpet Weaving)** – aiming to preserve Western Armenian cultural tradition of

embroidery, felting, and rug weaving and promote job opportunities for Syrian women in this field. Experts provide training to women who learn the craft of Van, Marash, Aintap, and Urfa style needlework.

8. **The Arabic Club & The Arabic Language Classes** – providing a platform for young professionals to improve their knowledge of the Arabic language and discuss contemporary issues relevant to the Middle East.
9. **Western Armenian Language Classes** – aiming to both preserve the Western Armenian language and to create employment opportunities for teachers of Western Armenian
10. **Skills and Knowledge of Youth Economic-Empowerment Project** - collaborating with World Vision Armenia, the project arms the youth in Armenia with the necessary managerial and leadership skills transferable to their respective field of expertise
11. **Counseling Support for Syrian Armenian Youth** – providing educational and professional counseling and psychological support for Syrian university students and young professionals
12. **Legal Assistance for Syrians in Armenia** – ensuring that Syrians in Armenia fully comprehend their rights and have access to the relevant legal services
13. **Center for Syrian Children and Youth** – contributing to the educational, scientific, spiritual, and physical development of Syrian children and youth in Armenia and stimulating their active involvement in the civil life in Armenia.

According to the data provided by Aleppo NGO, more than 6.000 Armenians have been engaged in the abovementioned projects. The NGO continues its operations and constantly keeps in touch with the beneficiaries of the projects to determine what are their needs and how else the NGO could support them.

Besides those projects, some organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) cooperate with each other to organize events specifically for repatriates. Considering the fact that the engagement of locals and repatriates is highly encouraged for almost all of such events, it is worthy to perceive those events as platforms that promote repatriate integration. Three events were chosen at random for an observation to examine the level of repatriates' openness with regards to maintaining a communication with local Armenians and to test whether the hypothesis of social isolation is true.



Figure 8: The Banner of the Event “Breath of The Syrian-Armenian Culture in Yerevan”

The first event chosen for observation was called “Breath of the Syrian-Armenian Culture in Yerevan.” It was an exhibition-sale of handmade jewelry and food. The events was organized by the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, the Center for Coordination of Syrian-Armenians’ Issues NGO and “Armenian Caritas” Charitable NGO, funded by the European Union,

and supported by Caritas Austria and Yerevan Municipality. The exhibition-sales was hosted as a part of the series of exhibitions called “Breath of the Syrian-Armenian Culture in Yerevan” that are organized for different occasions and different aims each time. This time, the aim was to direct the generated income to the budget allocated for building the New Aleppo district.

The number of participants was approximately 40. They had their pavilions set up to showcase their products. One of the advantages of organizing the exhibition in an open-air public space in the very center of Yerevan downtown was that the passers-by would notice it easily and, in case they were interested, they could easily approach the faire. The strategic location of the event enabled the organized to attract more foot traffic in contrast with events that are hosted in a closed hall.

The setting of the exhibition-sales was such that the visitors of the event could freely network and interact with the sellers. Mostly, as observations showed, the passers-by would approach the pavilions, talk to those standing on the other side for a while, and leave without purchasing anything. It was also interesting to note tourists who visited the event. Iranian and Russian tourists attempted to communicate with the sellers in English.

Women's Entrepreneurship Promotion and Empowerment Centre (WEPEC) NGO
Syrian Armenian Union
in cooperation with American University of Armenia (AUA) Extension

WEPEC  

Proudly presents
An Exhibition of Business Products
Created by Women Entrepreneurs

March 1-2, 2018
American University of Armenia,
40 Baghramyan Avenue

Our goals are to

- ◆ Promote women-owned start-ups or established businesses
- ◆ Discover new opportunities for cooperation
- ◆ Network with other women-owned businesses

Agenda:

Day 1: March 1
10:00-12:00 - Set-up of exhibit stations at AUA Agghibabyan Hall
12:00-12:30 - Exhibition Opening
12:30-18:00 - Exhibition

Day 2: March 2
12:00 - 17:00 - Exhibition
17:00 - 17:30 - Closing of the Exhibit

The event was well-organized. However, one of the limitations that was a huge drawback for the success of the exhibition-sales was the pre-event promotion of it. Exploring different social platforms and websites, I have found that the announcement about it was posted only on [Hayern Aysor](#) website. Moreover, a simple Facebook search showed that only two individuals have created public posts promoting the event where they have included the link to the announcement about

the event on Hayern Aysor. The rest of the posts or publications in and out of Facebook were press releases about the event published after the event was closed. No separate groups, pages, or events were created by the hosting entities to promote the event.

The second event where an observation has been made in the scope of this research was the An Exhibition of Business Products Created by Women Entrepreneurs organized by WEPEC Women's Entrepreneurship Promotion and Empowerment Center NGO, Syrian Armenian Union NGO, and AUA Extension. The event had three main goals: to promote women-owned businesses, come up with new partnership opportunities, and create a new venue for networking. Over 40 business ladies participated in the exhibition. They showcased their products including clothing pieces, jewelry, and food in the Aghababian hall of AUA.

Besides the business goals of the event, the exhibition was successful in terms of networking. The students, staff, and faculty members of the University were freely interacting with the business women. No barriers to interaction were noted. Both the business women and the visitors were speaking in Armenian. For some-mainly the business women-talking exclusively in Eastern Armenian was a little bit difficult, but they never shifted to another language. Instead, the conversation would continue in Eastern Armenian with minor shifts to Western Armenian. Those shifts included pronunciation and/or grammar differences which, however, were not a burden for both interlocutors to understand each other. The event was open to public.

Unlike the first event, this one was promoted on social media. AUA Extension has created a Facebook event which 78 people marked “interested” and 22 people marked “going.” In addition, the AUA Communications has sent a direct email with a short description of the event and the flyer of the event attached to the students’, faculty and staff members’ individual email accounts.



Figure 10: The Banner of a Meet & Greet Event for Introducing Iravaban 24

The third event that was chosen for observation was Meet & Greet: Introducing Iravaban 24 organized by Repat Armenia and hosted by Impact Hub. The event was the continuation of Repat Armenia's tradition of organizing meet & greet events while creating a networking platform for Armenian repatriates, local Armenians, and those who are interested in moving to Armenia. During this event, an Armenian repatriate, Sergey Abelyan, was introducing his newly established law firm to the attendees and sharing his experience of starting a company in Yerevan.

About 30-35 people attended the event. The atmosphere of the event was overall friendly; all attendees seemed to be very open for conversation. Most of them interacted in Armenian, some preferred to talk to each other in Russian or English. Nonetheless, the networking was definitely successful.

As far as the pre-event PR strategy is concerned, after I conducted a thorough analysis of major social media platforms, it was evident that the organizers' focus was again on Facebook. A Facebook event was created by Repat Armenia and shared by Repat Armenia and Iravaban 24. For this event, 69 people marked "interested" and 31 people marked "going."

Analyzing the online social networks that offer assistance to the Armenian repatriates, it is crucial to mention that the main focus was put on Facebook as the most used social networking website. Two major groups were found. The first one is the “Armenian Repatriates’ Network.” As of today, it has more than 5400 members. This group provides an online networking opportunity to the Repatriates. Members are free to ask questions, look for recommendations, and get informed about different social events.

The second group is “Jobs for Repats and Expats in Armenia.” Currently it has more than 3.500 members and the number is growing day by day. This group, in contrast with the first one, is narrowed down to job seeking and sharing. The admins of the group are regularly posting new job openings for people of different specializations, and the members of the group who look for a job are free to post about themselves too. Both groups are created by Repat Armenia and are open to anyone who wants to join the community of repatriates.

Recommendations & Conclusion

Collecting and analyzing all the research findings, now I am able to answer the research questions that were asked initially:

- **What are the main difficulties that repatriates have been encountering in Armenia?**

Having considered all the research findings, it becomes evident that there are common difficulties that repatriates encounter while attempting to integrate to the local Armenian community. My initial hypothesis is proved. Almost all Armenian repatriates face the difficulties of social isolation and linguistics barriers (specifically knowledge of Eastern Armenian). In

addition, surveys and interviews brought forward that financial difficulties and cultural shock are two other major issues for repatriates. However, the repatriates experience shows that all of the above-mentioned issues are resolvable if appropriate measures are undertaken.

Repatriates' responses show that they heavily rely on themselves or their friends/relatives' support when they try to overcome the abovementioned barriers to integration. Even though there are a number of organizations in Armenia that offer a helping hand to the repatriating Armenians, most of them prefer not to refer to those organizations. Instead, they actively take part in individual projects organized by those organizations without referring directly to the hosting organization. Engaging in projects, interacting with their peers, or networking with other repatriates or locals in the framework of a specific project, succeed to overcome the difficulties related to social isolation and linguistic barriers. This helps to recover from the cultural shock that most repatriates reported to have experiences when they first entered the local community in Armenia.

On the other hand, resolving financial difficulties seems to be more challenging. Presumably, the reason is the overall socio-economic conditions in Armenia that most of the times do not meet the repatriates' expectations regarding their incomes. Still, many repatriates have decided to start their own businesses in Armenia, others got used to regular salaries, while others receive financial support from local organizations.

Having considered these experiences of repatriates, there is definitely a need to adopt an innovative approach which will help repatriates overcome all the difficulties to integration into the local community with a more ease.

- **What innovative approaches could be undertaken and implemented to target repatriate integration issues more effectively?**

- **What role can online social media play in repatriation process?**

One innovative approach that I recommend to implement is the creation of a unified online platform for repatriates. This platform, preferably a new website, should offer a free registration for anyone who's willing to create an account on that platform. The website will allow repatriates to socialize with each other online, network with locals who have already registered in the website. This platform will be different from other social networking websites in a way that it will be clear for the registrants that it has been created specifically for repatriate integration in Armenia.

A major advantage that it will offer to the Armenian community is that it will help to improve the PR strategies of all the events organized with the participation of repatriates regardless of who's the organized or the host of the event. As the observations of three different events showed, the events that were comparably successful, for which a pre-event PR has been conducted. More specifically, the results of the event observations show that it is crucial to ensure a broad online coverage of pre-event announcement in order to make sure that more people are informed about the event.

The online platform will help to target the right audience while planning the pre-event PR having in mind that the registrants of the platform are voluntarily willing to become a part of repatriate integration either as a repatriate or as a local.

Moreover, the platform would grant the employees an opportunity to find the right employer for their company. Having shared their experience and education online, the employers will be able to go through the profiles of the registrants and find the person who meets their required criteria the best.

As far as the linguistic barrier is concerned, most of the repatriates who have filled in the online questionnaire stated that the Eastern Armenian language was a barrier for them at first. However,

as they started to go out and socialize more, they have learned the Eastern Armenian language, and now it does not prevent them from integrating to the local community. The platform will enable the repatriates to find new friends, establish an online communication among each other. Online communication, compared to a face-to-face communication, saves a lot of time for the repatriates. Furthermore, taking into account that they can visit the website any time, from anywhere at their convenience, it will become a more preferable form of communication for repatriates.

The website will allow the repatriates to find friends with common interests and mentality, share advice from their personal experience and possibly organize new events for meeting and networking.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the new platform will be conducted following the cycle suggested by Chew & Debowski. The registrants of the platform will be asked to share their thoughts about the platform's effectiveness on a regular basis. They will be asked the following questions:

1. How many new friends did you make using our platform?
2. How many events have you attended that you have been informed about via our platform?
3. Were you able to find a job/employee using this platform?

Additionally, the administrators of the website will track down the number of events created and the number of connections that have been made using the platform. The regular evaluation will also help to improve the implementation strategy for this innovative approach.

Limitations & Avenues for Future Research

One major limitation that I encountered while conducting this research was the challenge of finding a large number of repatriates to survey. The surveys were shared on major repatriate groups and sent directly to emails of some repatriates whom I knew personally and who willingly shared those surveys within their circle of friends and acquaintances. Hopefully, with a successful implementation of the recommendation of this research, other researchers will not have a hard time searching and reaching out to repatriates.

Another limitation for this research was time. If I had more time, I would definitely find more repatriates to talk to and conduct more in-depth interviews in addition to the online surveys. Moreover, having more time would enable me to revise more literature related to not only repatriate integration but also policy recommendations and revisions.

I hope to enlarge the scope of this research in the future. I believe that this research is a quite stable basis for conducting future research and making the recommendation for improving repatriate integration more targeted.

A possible avenue for this research is to conduct a research with a more specific group of repatriates. For example, an entire research project could be dedicated to repatriates from Western countries, and another separate paper could be written about repatriates from the Middle East. A more specified target group for such research could help to target the issues that repatriates from a given region (or country) encounter collectively and come up with stronger and sharper recommendations.

Another possible avenue for a future research is to find out what are the difficulties that repatriates of different professions are facing in Armenia. In the scope of this research, we saw that one of the issues to integration is financial difficulties. A more narrowed down research would

help to improve the financial situation of repatriates by conducting a targeted research based on the professions of the repatriates. The research questions for this kind of project would be more specific and concrete (e.g.: What are the main issues to integration for doctors in Armenia?).

Armenia is a developing country that accepts a continuously growing number of repatriates each year. It is highly critical to properly address the possible barriers that the Armenian repatriates may face while repatriating. Comprised of both theoretical and practical aspects of this research, this and similar research projects are great sources for pragmatic recommendations to improve the living conditions of those who have decided to permanently move to Armenia.

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