



**CONVENTION OF
THE FUTURE ARMENIAN**

10-12 MARCH 2023

Yerevan

GROWING POPULATION

Framing question:

What are the key steps we can take to solve our demographic challenges and ensure a stable future for Armenia?



**Armenia's current
demographic situation**

	Births	Deaths	Permanent population at the beginning of the year, thousand people
1990	79 882	21 993	3 514.9
1991	77 825	23 425	3 574.5
1992	70 581	25 824	3 633.3
...			
2020	36 353	36 433	2 959.7
2021	36 623	34 388	2 963.3
2022	36 353	26 805	2 961.4

“Available analyses indicate that there is little to be hopeful about in terms of demographics in Armenia. According to experts, **we have a very sad picture of natural growth, which has not recovered after the war. Emigration rates are also quite high,**” as stated by the experts during long and comprehensive discussions around Armenia’s demographic situation.

Armenia's population keeps declining. The negative balance of migration waves also remains a problem. For example, according to the border registrations of entries and exits through Armenia’s border checkpoints, **27,941 people left Armenia in 2022, which is a greater number than the number of returnees with Armenian identity documents.**

Armenia's population is also aging. **Only every fifth family has a child under the age of 15.**

“Apart from the pandemic and the war, the deterioration of the security environment is of demographic significance. It is necessary to define the problem of maintaining the current number of the population for the coming years, because **after 2026, we will have a decline in the number of births,**” experts consider. Preventing the population from reaching a point of irreversible decline would be a significant accomplishment. Our goals for the future must be both ambitious and achievable.

According to various estimates, in the case of maintaining the current rates, **by 2050 the population of the Republic of Armenia will be about 1.9 million, and in 2100, 1 million.** Expectations are not positive either, and there is a lack of faith in possible optimistic future scenarios. Consequently, far fewer people today are inclined to expect population growth. “I’m under the impression that a kind of race has started in society to obtain an **American Green card or a Russian passport,** and too many people are involved in these processes. Isn't this a sign of despair?” a participant of the discussion pointed out with sadness.

Security, faith, hope. These are the most important aspects of the demographic situation, experts consider. And what is being done in Armenia today around the demography and

population growth issues is assessed as highly insufficient. *“We have an apathetic mood among the public. Many people are not aware of the reality and the problems, and do not imagine their scale. Moreover, many do not know what they want, what they would like to change and how to do it. A clear policy is needed to solve the aforementioned problems, as all local research and individual efforts aimed at any problem are not concerted and remain fruitless.”*

In recent years, **various efforts have been made by the state in this direction**: in particular, the housing program, the increase of the one-time monetary allowance for first and second children of families, state benefits for non-working parents in rural areas, etc. However, there are far more serious factors that negatively impact mitigation efforts that require a much more comprehensive approach.

According to experts, we must first understand and define **what demographic goals we are setting**. What are Armenia’s demographic possibilities and potential? How and what quality outcome can be ensured? How big of a population do we imagine Armenia to have in the next **10, 20 or 30 years? Do we consider a population of 2 million, 4 million, 6 million or maybe 3 million** realistic and acceptable? Why?

Experts see the importance of a highly active, two-level complementary effort system.

1. the priority and overarching goal of **improving the demographic situation** lying at the basis of all state policies in all sectors,
2. **broad public support** and initiatives.

However, even experts differ in their approach to policy scalability.

“Demographic mainstreaming: to declare demography to be a major issue that should be served by the policies of other spheres. Until now, demographic policy has been perceived as a tool of social support. We need a comprehensive policy that encourages people to stay in Armenia and create,” a group of experts say.

*“The demographic policy should be **a set of smaller policies and programs**, because having and implementing a comprehensive and unified policy is expensive and not within the means of the current Armenia,”* - countered others.

Which route to take and how? This needs to be seriously talked about. However, everyone agrees on one thing: **there is an obvious need for urgent steps**.

The importance of broad public support for the process and support by private initiatives were also clearly emphasized in the discussions. **What should the general public do? What can our businesspeople, cultural and educational institutions do? What can all the media do? What kind of ideas for feasible initiatives can there be?** Experts are drawing everyone’s attention to these issues and encouraging creative discussions.



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**Natural population
growth**

Actuality

The experts discussed in detail a wide range of issues related to fertility, life expectancy, mortality, aging population, health care, marriages and divorces, support for young families, the role of women in society, employment, the role of providing educational opportunities and natural population growth.

For years, Armenia had a **fertility rate of 2.1**, which has decreased and currently stands at 1.6-1.7. The birth rate in the regions is even lower compared to Yerevan. At a rate of 1.6, it is still possible to bring it closer to 2.1 with the right policies, but at a rate of 1.3, the resulting situation becomes, in a sense, irreversible.

The declining birth rate is a global phenomenon, and the need to have children has been steadily decreasing in Armenia for quite some time. **Postponing marriages and the birth of the first child** is also a visible phenomenon nowadays. **Divorce** also paints an alarming picture: every third newly created family is in the risk group. The issue of **gender-biased sex selection** remains a problem, although it has improved in recent years, and even though this issue does not have a significant impact on the demographic picture. *“Our health is in a very bad state, and we have a big problem with the elderly. In our country, the situation of children under 5 years old is very good, we are almost close to European indicators. The general longevity number has increased at the expense of this age group, and still we say that the picture is positive”* - one of the experts shared their concerns during the discussion of life expectancy issues.

The **gender-age composition** of our society is almost similar to the gender-age composition of a country that went through the World War II. There is a huge shortage of men aged 25 and over. War is a noticeable factor here, but the biggest problem and factor in this case is migration.

We have varying levels of mortality in Yerevan and regions. The health care system does not function as a unified body that can provide equal access to healthcare in the capital and regions. This directly affects mortality and other indicators.

Policy

It is necessary to develop and have a **family unit, a model based on national goals**, and build the entire societal relations philosophy on its basis, from kindergarten, textbooks and advertisements to the pension system. For example, in extended families, the influence of values by grandparents on grandchildren is much greater, and the elderly are the bearers of the belief of having many children.

Motherhood should be promoted as a value, and something held in high esteem as a source of happiness. *“There are girls (approximately 1 in 10) who do not get married for various reasons, but they want to have a child. But only because our society looks at it badly, they don't have children. Such women are often harassed by women themselves.*

Meanwhile, everyone should unite and honor the woman who wants to have a child without a husband,” said one of the experts. **Shooting even one high-quality feature film** about a woman who decides to have a child without her husband can change the atmosphere in the country.

There are also problems in ensuring **the working conditions of mothers taking care of children**. In Armenia, pregnant women and pensioners are very often left out of economic activity and do not work, but they can be retrained and, as much as possible, come back and get involved in various professional fields. This is a problem that will continue to restrict birth rates in the country.

As an option to promote natural growth, the experts suggested to consider the experience of the Russian Federation, where under the **“Maternal Capital” program**, new parents are provided with land or financial support exclusively for its acquisition, and its volume is increased with each subsequent child.

It is important to assess the available opportunities in the labor market, because women with young children should be able to have **part-time employment opportunities**. In the case of such positions, it should be divided into two parts and given to two people, so that the latter can manage to plan other things to do with the work.

Experts also emphasized **the role of the church**. *“In preaching, in my opinion, the clergy has a great role, especially in villages, unlike cities. People listen to representatives of the rural clergy in their communities. Moreover, the clergymen of the villages very often have their own families and are close to the local population and their concerns, and from this point of view, they are able to correctly assess people's needs and approaches,”* they concluded.

In the expert discussions, **the creation of large-scale advocacy and awareness mechanisms** was particularly highlighted from the viewpoint of public initiatives. *“Everyone who is concerned should become the spreader, proponent, and example of the idea of having many children”*. A non-governmental organization with the tentative name “At least four children” can specialize in initiating and managing a large advocacy campaign. Along with a big wave of advocacy campaigns, the state can also promote **a policy encouraging the birth of third and fourth children**, and it will be possible to achieve results through joint efforts.

According to experts, in order to contribute to the problem of starting a family among the young people of Armenia and the Diaspora, the possibility of creating an **“online pan-Armenian dating platform”** can be considered. As a result of thorough inspection and registration of Armenian participants, it will be easier for young Armenians who are interested in getting to know each other, getting close, and starting a family.



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**Immigration and
emigration**

The Problem

Migration continues to be a major factor in population growth. And we continue to register negative migration trends.

The experts discussed three groups of questions on immigration and offered to choose which priority direction to invest efforts in.

1. **Organization of immigration of emigrant Armenians**

What steps should be taken so that Armenians who emigrated return to Armenia? What factors should be ensured, is it possible to implement them or not, is it useful to organize this process for us or not?

2. **Organization of immigration of representatives of historical diaspora**

How to help members of the Diaspora immigrate to Armenia? We have had similar historical events at different times, and we and our compatriots have returned to their homeland from Syria, Lebanon, and recently also from Russia and Ukraine. What can be done to keep immigrants here and what can be done so that more and more people from the Diaspora come and live in Armenia?

3. **Organization of immigration of foreigners**

Do we want foreigners to come and live in Armenia? Will such immigration help Armenia or not? What are the prospects for this issue, and what are the near and far impacts?

In the discussions of the topic “Armenia-Diaspora Unity”, we have already considered in detail the **possibility of a Great Immigration**. The idea of organizing a mass immigration of Armenians was enthusiastically received by many, but there were also opposing opinions that were just as valid. *“Why are we formulating a problem of Diaspora Armenian immigration? What is more important from RA's point of view today? to have a pensioner who lives here today is secure, or to have one pensioner who, in the case of a highly organized policy of the state, becomes the actor and propagandist of the approaches of the state, the government. I think the second option is better.”*

There was also a conflict of opinions in the third topic: **the involvement of foreigners**. We must ask the question: Do we want to have an Armenia inhabited only by Armenians, or instead a state that can be a home for people of other nations, religions and values? Maybe we should organize the immigration of people like us, who are Christian, tolerant and share common values? Are we tolerant toward people of foreign nationalities in Armenia? Quite positive opinions were expressed regarding the involvement of foreigners, but there were still those who had other opinions. In particular, it was mentioned that there is a question of priorities here. For example, when **you have not stopped emigration**, talking about attracting members of other nations cannot have a positive perception among the public.

“Our priority should be to keep people in the country. From the point of view of importance, this is a much more urgent task than bringing in people from outside,” was

heard in expert discussions. In the case of Syrian Armenians, we had a large influx, but were not able to keep many of them. There are many factors that make people leave and often they are very human and personal. There are many people who do not listen to the possible options offered to them as an alternative to leaving Armenia. People of this group consider Armenia as a transit country.

Emigration is one of our painful topics. Why have people emigrated and continue to emigrate from Armenia? If it is possible to determine the specific reasons why people leave, then it will be possible to conduct evaluations and understand how to eliminate these reasons. *“The saddest thing is that **there is no perception that the departure of anyone from Armenia is a big problem.** This is almost not manifested in public and other sentiments,”* this is how the experts expressed their concern.

When asked why people leave Armenia, they mention the security situation. **We still have voluntary-mandatory returns**, where the majority of returnees are mostly people who went to the European Union and were refused asylum. Now, we do not have clear data on how many people coming to Armenia from Russia and other places will continue to stay here, and how many people use their Armenian passports to go to Europe.

To do

With the initiation of **the public movement “Emigration is a shame”** and the use of various propaganda tools, it is possible to influence the public atmosphere that favors emigration, changing people's behavior as well.

It is necessary to be able to foresee possible near-term flows to Armenia and properly prepare for the arrival of people. *“In Israel, they have an agency that deals with the organization of flows of Jews, while we don’t have such a body”* experts mentioned. **The creation of an immigration organization and advocacy agency** is also becoming important in Armenia.

If, through the efforts of our diaspora, it is possible for the **US Congress to make an amendment to the Social Security law**, and Armenian pensioners, along with Israel and Poland, will also be given the opportunity to receive their pension while they are away from the country, it will be an incentive for repatriation.

The experts talked about many other possible actions to take. To enrich that list, the participants of the Convention are invited **to brainstorm and generate fresh ideas.**