

The impact of LGBT emigration on economic indicators of Armenia

[abstract]

The rates of emigration from Armenia cover wider layers of society day by day: people of different ages, education, social status and other characteristics are leaving the country, which is alarming. As a result, not only the demographic indicators, but also the entire social structure is being exposed to noticeable changes. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Assistant Representative in Armenia Garik Hayrapetyan notes: *"During these 13 years (meaning 2000-2013- ed. group) we have a total of 311 thousand negative balance, that is, we have lost a population of 311 thousand, or more than 10% of our total population."*¹ The quantitative data of emigrants, however, only points out one side of the problem. The qualitative changes taking place in society as a result of it are also important. As a result of the emigration, number of mostly able-bodied citizens with professions and skills, social activism is decreasing in the country.

Taking into account that the factors contributing to the emigration are not only economical, but also connected with political, legal, cultural (normative values) factors, our goal is not only to make the negative impact of mass-emigration, such as economic damages, visible, but also to point out political, legal and cultural opportunities to ease them. This particularly applies to certain vulnerable groups, especially to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people, whose emigration behavior, in addition of being part of a global trend, has specific features. Many of them are forced to leave their homeland because of the society's discriminatory treatment. As you can see in the [full version](#) of the analysis, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is widespread in almost all areas of public life (including family, workplace, education and healthcare institutions etc.). With an absence of this discrimination, LGBT people would be less

likely to want to leave the country, taking with them their own workforce, professional and other skills, intellectual capacity, financial resources, etc.

Therefore, apart from the overall economic policy, the ease of emigration also requires special approaches with legislative, human rights, informational, and other political tools.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the project is to study the impact of LGBT emigration on economic indicators of Armenia during 2011-2013 as a result of discrimination against the LGBT community and to reflect those changes in a long-term perspective.

The project consists of two main parts:

1. Sociological study on LGBT emigration and peculiarities of contributing factors to emigration.
2. Economic assessment on the economic impacts of emigration.

The study related to issues regarding LGBT persons is difficult throughout the world, including Armenia, where the matter of sexuality is extremely sensitive, and sexual orientations other than heterosexuality are taboo. There are no studies done in Armenia on the total number of LGBT persons. Moreover, it is hard to imagine the possibility of obtaining reliable results even in case of such study. All research attempts done in Armenia only refer to self-perceived LGBT group, who are a part of the community to some extent, and/or those who have become subjected to some type of discrimination, a victim of violence, and thus became beneficiaries of non-governmental organization working in the sphere of human rights or LGBT issues.

"We must be sure we have a neutral or loyal government... because then it will be possible to be gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual, and be Armenian, an RA citizen and to live in Armenia", – expert

Due to the lack of studies about the LGBT community, we have a situation where only experts from different spheres (psychologists, sexologists, human rights defenders /

¹Civilnet c-ՎՄԱԳԱԳ program, see http://civilnet.am/2014/07/22/c-academy-unfpa-garik-hayrapetyan-demographics/#.VEC1B_mSyXp

advocates, doctors, etc.) are aware of some aspects of social behavior of LGBT people. Therefore, experts are becoming the core sources of information, whose assessments on LGBT community are the only grounded data. The sociological part of our research is based on the method of focused (semi-structured) interviews with such experts. The experts have been chosen by their professional sectors, by the criteria of contacts' circle size and intensity of communications with LGBT persons. A total of 15 core informer-experts were surveyed.

During the economic analysis, the following four indicators have been considered: expenditure on education, income not generated, GDP not generated and revenues not acquired by the budget calculated per single emigrant of average demographic figures in 2011-2013, at dollar parity as of January 1st, 2014, considering also the need to secure correspondence for making international comparisons (Armenia's Purchasing Power Parity – PPP). Predictions are also made in the end for the values of those figures, given the maintenance of current trends.

HOMOPHOBIA AND LGBT EMIGRATION

The lack of human rights protection, the absence of opportunities for non-discriminatory self-actualization as an emigration factor first of all refers to the society's most vulnerable groups, including LGBT people. The fact that LGBT individuals intend to emigrate because of discrimination, especially forever (first of all it is about self-identified LGBT people), our experts, who were requested to comment on this matter, also confirmed: *“Those who leave wish not to come back”, “I want to leave, Armenia is not a place to live, I do not see my future here.”* The number of people saying such things is high; I would not exaggerate if I say 60-70%. Among my acquaintances that number can even reach 80%”.

According to one of the experts **“Heterosexuals are leaving in order to earn money abroad, money going into the first place; and the primary cause of LGBT people is to have freedom and to live in peace”**.

This position is based on the existing homophobia in society, which is common in almost all social groups. Thus, for example, "Public attitudes towards LGBT people in Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor" survey done in 2011 shows

that 70.9% of respondents believe that these are strange people, and 97.4% are confident that the phenomenon is deviation and should be condemned by society.² According to data by the "Caucasus Barometer 2011" held by CRRC, 97% of the Armenian population does not approve of homosexuality³, and "social cohesion" survey results show that 95% of the population would not want to have a homosexual neighbor⁴.

LGBT emigration, besides the presence of number of problems, also reveals the fact of inactivity of the state in solving these problems.

ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF EMIGRATION

Main Findings: LGBT individuals who emigrate from Armenia because of discrimination do not usually send remittances, which implies that Armenian society mainly suffers financially following their emigration. The losses are measurable in monetary terms when it

comes to the state expenditure on the upbringing and education of the individual (whether or not LGBT), the income that the emigrant would have generated in working or undertaking entrepreneurial activity in Armenia, as well as the revenues that the budget would receive. The calculations made by this study demonstrate that, for a citizen of Armenia of average demographics who emigrated during the years 2011-2013, a minimum of the equivalent of \$3,545 was spent on

education. According to approximate estimates, 5,891 citizens of Armenia emigrated due to discrimination during the years 2011-2013, which implies that society has lost around \$21 million in one go only in terms of educational investment toward LGBT emigrants.

As for income not received, the calculations reveal that, in the year following emigration during 2011-2013,

“And, of course, in these high rates of emigration every person is of a great price and is a great loss. And if people emigrate because of the lack of justice, it is a greater loss, because it turns out that emigration is happening due to the choice of the state.”, - expert

²Public opinion toward LGBT people in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor cities

<http://issuu.com/pinkarmenia/docs/lgbtsurveyen/>

³Caucasus Barometer 2011 Armenia- JUSHOMO: Justified or not - Homosexuality (%)

<http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2011am/JUSHOMO/>

⁴Social Cohesion Survey <http://www.crrc.am/research-and-surveys/completed-projects/social-cohesion-survey?lang=en>

"If they don't leave, the benefit of it will be that the Armenian society will have potential da Vinci, Tchaikovsky, Michel Foucault, or Patrokloss, who was known as a good soldier in ancient Greece. Thus, potential scientists, artists, musicians, soldiers or even general officers in the military sphere and other good experts in any other field can have a very large investment in the future of the country. If they have the opportunity to stay in Armenia and get educated, develop and express themselves, paint their own Mona Lisa, it can be just as beneficial to Armenia as Parajanov museum", - expert

Armenia did not receive an additional \$15,000 approximately, which comes to (5,891 x 15,000=) \$88,365,000 across three years and for all LGBT emigrants. This is the loss following only one year after emigration, but that loss is prevalent in reality in all the years until the emigrant reaches retirement age.

Budget revenues for all three years taken together – 2011-2013 – could have been more by \$20 million had the LGBT individuals who left due to discrimination remained. As a result of the emigration of 5,891 LGBT individuals during the years 2011-2013 (5% of the total number of emigrants during those years), the state budget will lose around \$2 billion in revenue, at purchasing power as of January 1, 2014, over the course of more than the following 36 years (until retirement).

Given that emigration rates from Armenia will be maintained at the 2011-2013 average annual levels (39,273 people) in the near future, given that GDP growth rate will be around 5% and PPP will remain unchanged, as a result of LGBT emigration in the following twelve years, from 2014 to 2025, GDP will have a loss of \$3 billion at purchasing power as of January 1, 2014, adjusted for PPP, while the budget will lose \$370 million at purchasing power as of January 1, 2014.

The elimination of discrimination in the labor market is the most important step, which will allow for the struggle against discrimination to take place in other spheres as well, placing society on a more democratic footing.

It is clear that the process of economic improvement is a much more complicated and lengthy process, taking into account the need to solve not only internal but also external problems (the above said does not mean that economic development policy is secondary or impossible to implement). However, the emigration stimulating psychosocial factors are easily manageable for state institutions if responsible approach and required

targeting is demonstrated. Therefore, if there is consistent state policy, we believe that the social and psychological stress will reduce, and, of course, significant reduction of emigration from Armenia and emigration sentiments will be observed, especially among LGBT people, for whom the psychosocial stimuli for emigration are a priority.

"Simply by their presence, LGBT people remind us about the importance of diversity as a philosophical concept, which is also based on the grounds of democracy, human rights etc. Why? Because such people in the society remind us that people can vary in different aspects – political and other. LGBT individuals do not let totalitarian system to develop; diversity doesn't lead to a totalitarian system, and if they do not emigrate, but stay and fight, they'll prevent the transition to a totalitarian system", - expert

THE CONDITIONS OF REDUCING LGBT EMIGRATION

- *Reduction of homophobia*
- *Security guarantee by the state, a fair judicial system*
- *Information policy, work with mass media*
- *Publicizing an alternative idea of family*
- *Increasing visibility, politicization of own interests and consistent reclamation of rights*

ACTIONS AIMED AT REDUCING THE EMIGRATION OF LGBT PERSONS

Based on the need of formation of the above-mentioned conditions, we have developed recommendations addressed to different actors:

The state (RA state bodies, Government, National Assembly):

- Implement a common state policy based on the principle of non-discrimination in all spheres of public life.
- Implement RA Government social policy and human capital development envisaged by RA Government 2012-2017 program based on the principle of non-discrimination in various fields towards society's most vulnerable groups, in this case LGBT persons.
- Adopt a separate piece of legislation prohibiting discrimination, which will prohibit discrimination on any basis in labor market and all the spheres of the society, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all.
- Adopt effective law enforcement mechanisms. Anti-discrimination legislation is, of course, necessary, but it is not enough, and without effective mechanisms discrimination will not just disappear.
- Take into consideration the principle of non-discrimination when adopting laws and normative-legal acts as a basic rule for ensuring the realization of rights and freedoms of a citizen.

To local and international companies:

- Clearly state in internal regulations of companies the exclusion of discrimination on any basis, the consequences of discrimination against workers, and undertake appropriate measures in case of abuse of official authority.
- Undertake explanatory work among the employees about the consequences of discrimination, organize self-help groups, and promote teamwork.

To non governmental organizations and civil initiatives:

- Advocate and promote the adoption of the anti-discrimination legislation.
- Raise public awareness about discrimination, negative consequences deriving from it,

importance of elimination of discrimination and principles of equality.

- Provide an alternative platform to inform, to discuss the topics of human rights, discrimination and tolerance.
- Organize civil initiatives to create labor unions in order to protect workers' rights and to combat various forms of discrimination in the workplace.

To mass media:

- Raise public awareness about LGBT issues and the existing discrimination against them.
- Let the community members speak and express themselves when writing about LGBT persons or raising LGBT issues.
- Avoid labeling, stigmatizing, and discriminatory statements and qualifications.

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