

AN ISLAND WITHIN AN ISLAND

Educational Needs Assessment of Armenian Migrants in Turkey

ANNA MURADYAN

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For all living beings

Istanbul , 2015

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CONTENT

The viewpoints in this publication belong to the author and they may not necessarily concur partially or wholly with the viewpoints of YUVA Association and the Hrant Dink Foundation.

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This research is about Armenian migrants from Armenia based in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul. The research gives data on their living conditions, residence permit situation, future plans and other statistical information. The main focus of the research is to reveal how migrants' educational needs can be addressed and solved, for example, by life-long learning. It is considered for wide range of audience, including migration experts, journalists, NGOs, donors, etc.

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PREFACE

Because of its geographical location, present day Anatolia has always been the bottleneck of main routes of many things: Silk Road, migrant birds and people. Today's Turkey is not only a major transit country, but also a country which hosts the greatest number of migrants in the world, according to António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2 million Syrian people are under temporary protection, tens of thousands of Afghans, Iraqis, Africans and people from neighboring countries are residing in Turkey.

Armenian migrants are one of the many migrants groups in Turkey, yet maybe one of the most vulnerable ones as they are more prone to discrimination due to the years long conflict between Armenia and Turkey. While the land border between Armenia and Turkey is closed, yet around 10 thousand migrants from Armenia live and work in Istanbul.

YUVA has been actively working with refugees since the uprising has started in Syria in 2011. We have been providing language courses, psychosocial support and lifelong learning activities for adults and children through our community centers in south eastern Turkey. Our main aim is social cohesion and self-sufficiency.

At the same time, we have been working on reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey through cross-cultural projects. Armenian migrants became an interest point as they have been relatively neglected by governmental and non-governmental organisations. We wanted to know whether we can provide similar services to Armenian migrants as we do for Syrian refugees.

Fellowship Programme of the Hrant Dink Foundation was a wonderful opportunity to carry out a needs analysis and as an Armenian citizen herself and as an experienced journalist, Anna Muradyan was the perfect candidate to implement it. I hope that her report will help us and other organisations in our efforts to support Armenian migrants in Turkey and also contribute to reconciliation between two countries.

Erdem Vardar
Director of YUVA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Though Russian Federation was and is the most attractive destination country for Armenian migration potential, however, there is some outflow to Turkey, especially to Istanbul since independence of Armenia. Since this direction is considered to have been too small within desirable destination countries for Armenian migrants, the RA National Statistics Service had not collected any data before. Meanwhile, because of the absence of the Armenian-Turkish diplomatic relations, Armenian migrants are completely out of attention and there are not many researches in this field – the last one was carried out in 2009.

This research somehow fills the gap existing in the literature about Armenian migrants' life or residential conditions. Aiming at revealing the educational needs of Armenian migrants, the research also contains a lot of information about their age, gender, social status, future plans and other statistical data.

In the research Armenian migrants are classified into four groups: a) single women working in Istanbul while their families are in Armenia, b) married women who are in Istanbul with their families, c) men and children, d) prostitutes and victims of trafficking. The target of this research are women who represent the groups a) and b).

The information is based on 40 in-depth interviews, 15 expert interviews such as migration experts, NGO representatives, researchers, informal decision makers, etc. and included observation.

The research material makes it possible to come to the following conclusion: the condition of Armenian labor workers residing in Istanbul has changed as compared with the situation before 2010 and these changes are expressed by three indicators:

- Migration flow from Armenia is decreasing
- The number of regular migrants has been increasing
- A tendency of residing in Turkey and not returning to Armenia has been registered

As a result of the evaluation of migrants' educational needs it became evident that they have no short-term educational needs—their primary goal is to find

a well-paid job and earn money. Instead, they need specific knowledge and information in the long run, especially the women of group b) who work partially since they have to take care of their husbands and children. At the same time, children of this group achieving the age of school graduation and having no possibility to gain any profession or to continue education, carry on doing the same job as their parents do, e.g. housecleaning, taking care of old people or kids.

In this regard, the research implies the need of a migration resource center the primary function of which is to provide different kind of information. The main thing the Armenian migrants need, as they explained, is to learn about the rights they have, especially about residence permits. The resource centre is thus thought to be a place to provide trainings and information according to preferences and needs of migrants.

Taking into consideration the abovementioned, several suggestions are made for creating friendly conditions for Armenian migrants.

To the Turkish Government

- To find a legal solution for the Hrant Dink School operating in Getik Paşa, preserving its autonomy and grant it a legal status.
- To support civil society in establishing a migration resource centre in Kumkapı, serving to the solution of migrants' needs and problems. At the same time, to create a legal consultancy body for migrants under the Directorate of Migration Management.

To the Governments of Armenia and Turkey

- Guided by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which defines the procedures of providing diplomatic service by a third-party country, to provide service to the citizens of Armenia through an embassy of a country located in Istanbul which has diplomatic relations with Armenia.

To Turkish Civil Society

- To create a migration resource center which will support the integration of migrants to the local context and provide legal consultancy.

INTRODUCTION

This is my first experience in conducting academic research. The story of how the idea was born and implemented is detailed in the chapter, entitled “The charm of Kumkapı.”

Apart from presenting statistical data on the living conditions of migrant workers from Armenia in Istanbul and how to navigate their local context, the given research seeks to discover how their problems can be addressed and solved, for example, by life-long learning.

Facing many situations and conducting controversial interviews during the research period, I had many conflicting thoughts, one of which was that in the long run the reality that people actually get to experience completely changes their viewpoint, their former approach and inner predisposition towards the same issue. The empirical proof for this was my own personal experience, when I noticed after living in Istanbul for a few months Western Armenian thinking dominating clauses written with Eastern Armenian syntax. Moreover I immediately understood that it took more time to formulate my ideas in the same way I used to than before moving to Istanbul.

Another dilemma was the selectivity criterion towards people’s quotes, as many of them were almost “in love” with Turkey and Turks after living in Istanbul for years. In this regard, the most typical quote was by a woman who said directly, “If there were a second chance to be born again I would marry a Turkish man.” But there was one thing, beyond which-irrespective of their positive attitude towards Turks-no one transgressed: this was people’s religious feeling. The above-mentioned woman also stated that she does not like Muslim traditions.

During my journalistic experience I faced such situations without hesitation, as professionalism requires leaving personal attitudes and any kinds

of predispositions behind when entering the research field. I also applied the strategy of including two mutually exclusive standpoints in working with this material, knowing in advance the potentially negative reaction that might be taken towards this research both by Armenian and Turkish audiences.

The Aim of the Research

The main aim of the present research is to evaluate the educational needs of the Armenian migrants and understand how these problems can be addressed and changed.

This research touches upon the following two questions:

1. To describe the overall picture of the lifestyle and issues of the citizens of Armenia living in Istanbul, focusing on their lifestyle tendencies recorded since 2010, as Armenians who came to Istanbul fifteen years ago differ from those who came one or two years ago.
2. Through an educational needs assessment of the Armenian migrants, to indicate what specific initiatives should be undertaken to bring about change to the existing situation.

Methodology

In order to have a more detailed picture of the first question, the subchapters address the following questions:

1. Migration in Armenia and reasons for coming to Turkey
2. The social identity of migrants and their specific problems
3. What kinds of job they do, where they are based and how much they earn
4. What kinds of specific problems they face as being Armenians
5. Legal status and visa-related issues
6. What kinds of expectations Armenian migrants have and how long they plan to stay
7. Do they want to return to Armenia?

All the information is based on 40 in-depth interviews, 15 expert interviews and participant observation. To make the text more illustrative, the sub-

chapters are enriched with situation-driven info-graphics, as well as photos taken mainly in the key sites for the migrants - the police station, cargo agencies, telephone booths, etc.

All the interviews were conducted without a tape recorder, the migrants' words recorded via shorthand so that they could feel more free.

Among the experts there were clergymen, school headmasters, community decision makers, journalists, experts on migration, etc. Some of them preferred not to have a public interview, thus confidentiality is maintained regarding the references given to them.

The questionnaire:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Average monthly income
4. Educational background
5. Date of entry
6. Marital status (children if there are)
7. Residence status: legal, illegal, short-term visa, etc.
8. Marriages (mixed with Muslims, local Armenians)
9. Where they are from in Armenia
10. Where they live in Istanbul
11. Motivations for choosing Turkey
12. Occupation in Armenia
13. Occupation in Istanbul
14. Where are their families? Who have they left behind?
15. Future plans (do they want to return or not, how much they intend to stay)

The questionnaire also included questions aimed to clarify the relationship of Armenian migrants with Turks, Polis Armenians and with employers in general. There was also a question about the Genocide, and research materials give grounds to conclude that numerous years of living in Turkey has changed Armenian migrants' conceptions and perceptions of the Genocide. Though some chapters include shallow references to the mentioned issues, due to lack of resources and time that part is omitted in the text leaving room for further research. Thus, the given research covers only practical and pragmatic issues of vital importance to the emigrants. The expression

in the research title, "An island within an island" is a direct reference to the deep gap between the two Armenian communities, from Polis and from Armenia, which was defined as "an island within an island" by one of the migrants.

Regarding the second question, i.e. to study solutions to migrants' issues through life-long learning, a focus group interview with 8 participants was held to discuss the following questions:

1. Would they like to participate in trainings and specifically what kind of trainings?
2. According to them, what a resource center should be like?
3. Which of their needs should be targeted?



CHAPTER I

THE CHARM OF KUMKAPI

I met Anahit¹ from Gyumri, waiting for me at the Kadıköy port, for the first time in Kumkapı where I went to immerse myself in my field site, or, as we would say in Armenian, to explore the place through the eyes of its inhabitants – a process that felicitously corresponds to the fundamental attempt in ethnographic fieldwork to capture, as much as possible, the insider’s point of view as the outsider/researcher.

About two years ago I had been there once before; it was when I stepped into Turkey for the first time with a number of journalists to participate in the journalists’ exchange program organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation. Trying to get a grasp of Istanbul within a mere week, without having the slightest idea of either the size or the vastness of the city, I looked around every corner of Istanbul, and visited the “*Hrant Dink*” School for Armenian children that is located right in the heart of historic Constantinople. While walking along its streets, I felt myself as one who suddenly found herself thrust into the present out of the pages Armenian classical literature, and that short walk along the streets awakened some of my own feelings regarding my Turkish-Armenian past that were previously inaccessible. I visited a number of Turkish media agencies, and went to Diyarbakır for two days. As soon as I stepped foot there, it seemed to me that I had arrived home. Later, I came back to Istanbul and by continuing the process of learning about Turkey, I visited “*Aras*” Publishing House where I met Nivart² who mentioned that there were a lot of Armenians from Armenia³ working in Kumkapı.

¹ The interviewees’ names have been changed.

² Nivart Taşçı has defended her Master thesis on Armenian migrants <http://ata.boun.edu.tr/n-vart-ta-armenian-migrants-turkey-history-journey>.

³ In order to differentiate Armenians living in Turkey from those in Armenia, the terms “*Armenians*

“There are many Armenians from Armenia in Kumkapi,” said Nivart indifferently, and I don’t know why but I focused on the word Kumkapi.

When I returned to Armenia, I surfed the internet and realized that I hadn’t made a discovery – it had already been a few years since the discovery of the Armenians of Kumkapi. In particular, there were already at least two pieces of research about it, one of which was Nivart’s Master thesis.

The rigorous houses lined up along the narrow streets of Kumkapi with paved stones, promised some secrets and I could not get the latter out of my mind. When I again came to Istanbul for yet another reason, I went to the Patriarchate to conduct an interview, and by entering Kumkapi from the side of the highway stretching along the radiant Bosphorus, I found myself in the “Street of Restaurants,”⁴ as the Armenians from Armenia are used to calling it. It was an area that exuded the effect of being literally covered with tables, which were lined up from one end of the street to the other.

I didn’t have any intentions of writing a piece called “Table-covered Street” hoping that someone else would do that. But if I had written something, I would have used that title, as it couldn’t have possible to name it differently. Unlike the narrow streets of Kumkapi, this one was rather large, lined with luxurious tables from both sides along its length, and I had the impression as if I was in a kingdom covered with tables.

While walking along the “Table-covered Street”, I felt as if were in one of the tales I’d read in my childhood. The whole street was empty and not a single breath could be heard, and I had the impression that I was the only living being in that area and could do whatever I wanted in that “Table-covered Street”.

“I will come back here,” I thought to myself confidently, and I really did.

from Armenia” and “Polis Armenians” are applied in this research.

⁴ A street adjacent to the Police Station in Kumkapi that intersects with the highway along the Bosphorus. Kumkapi is generally known for its fish restaurants.

When I did return, I went to Kumkapi again and while I was passing the first crossroad intersecting with the street of the Patriarchate, my ear caught some Armenian being spoken. An elderly man and woman were talking in the Gyumri dialect. The woman’s name, as I was to find out later, was Anahit.

“Hello, how are you?” I greeted them with such a specific warmth and affection as if they were my parents’ neighbors. They could have turned out to be, as one of the migrant women was to describe later, **“such people with whom I would never share the same environment in Armenia, but here I had to.”**⁵ Nevertheless, I hadn’t yet learned this detail, and the aim of greeting them warmly was the result of being far from my Armenian environment for about a month, and it was my first phase of overcoming culture shock.

The couple was standing at the crossroads of the street which the Armenians from Armenia have coined “the Street of Leninakantsis” (people from Leninakan),⁶ and though not only Gyumretsis (people from Gyumri) lived there, a few days later the fact of hearing Gyumri Armenian became such a normal course of life that I sometimes forgot where I was.

It is interesting what name the foreigners living on a particular street will give to that street, because also many Africans and Uzbekis also live there. I don’t know if they have thoughts about it or not! It would be interesting to know if other nations also have the same approach to rename something to remind them of their own country. My flow of thoughts was continuing when after three or four meters I met another elderly woman from Armenia sitting in front of a street stand⁷ – a scene typical of the Armenian reality

⁵ In text some thoughts are in bold to emphasize that they are pivotal for the research.

⁶ The second largest city in Armenia that is now called Gyumri. During the Soviet years it was named Leninakan after the communists’ leader Lenin and this name is still circulated by the elderly generation. Gyumri is better known as Aleksandrapol among the Turkish society.

⁷ The declaration of the independence of Armenia in 1991 was accompanied with a deep economic recession and absence of wholesale goods. During that period people set up small tables in all of the streets and resell mainly first consumption food obtained from here and there. Among people those tables are known as “սեղանիկ” (small tables-counters).



KUMKAPI EGE

DENİZ KIZI RESTAURANT

"Table-covered Street" in Kumkapı

of the 90s. She was selling different foodstuffs of Armenian production—condensed milk and eggplant caviar—that are not sold in Istanbul supermarkets. It was the couple who had told me the idea of the stand and the variety of foods being sold there, but later on I found out that that stand wasn't the only one and that similar street stands, either the same or a bit different, were set up in different parts of Kumkapı, one of which, for instance, belonged to a Georgian woman who was selling almost the same products to her Georgian compatriots.

“How much does the eggplant caviar cost?” I asked in Turkish as I approached the elderly woman.

“Besh lira.”

“That is five lira,” I said out loud in Armenian, slightly hoping that as soon as the woman heard Armenian, she would be in the seventh heaven, and she might hug me and kiss my cheek. Nevertheless, nothing like that happened and the woman, without blinking, responded in Armenian.

“That is five lira.”

Witnessing that indifferent attitude towards Armenians I decided to change my strategy, but as I attempted to build friendly relations with her, the elderly woman began to put curses on all Armenians, and specifically on the Armenians from Armenia, in a clear Yerevan dialect, simultaneously elevating the art of cursing to the level of literature.

“Later I will surely cite these curses for some reason,” I thought and took some notes in my notepad in order not to forget them. The woman continued cursing indifferently and I noticed that there was a young man with an amputated leg, standing at her right side. He was closely watching my every move.

“Shouldn't I get insulted?” I thought to myself, especially as there was a man standing next to her. He could certainly be an Armenian. Then I thought that though the woman's curses were targeted at all Armenians (and I also was one of them) they had specific addressees—those who had bought some products and hadn't paid for



A small table called «սեղանիկ»

them yet, or so to say, those who were in *nisya*⁸ and hadn't paid their debts yet (i.e., Armenians who had let them down). Besides, if I got insulted, nothing would have changed. So instead I asked a few questions to the man with the amputated leg and found out that he was indeed an Armenian. He had come there to fly to Europe; he didn't have the intention to stay either in Istanbul or in Armenia. He was one of the first people I interviewed and at that time my experience in journalism prompted me to think that he wasn't telling the truth regarding some issues. Later I was to see him frequently on the “Street of Leninkantsis” and cautiously questioned other Armenians about some of my doubts. I found out that he was married though he had told me he was divorced; he also provided simit to simit sellers though he had told me he didn't work; and to the question of how he lived, especially without a job, he replied that he had many rich childhood friends and relatives living in Russia, who helped him.

⁸ *Nisya*: in Armenian slang *nisya* is used to connote the phenomenon of buying something without money with the agreement to pay back the debt later. The list of the bought products is written down in a copy-book that is called the *nisya* copy-book.

The young man has been in Istanbul for about seven months with the obvious aim to go to Europe and no intentions to return to Armenia. Most probably, he was worrying about how his words could influence his plans of going to Europe, though I had assured him (and not only him) many times that I wasn't recording our conversations and that no one's real name was going to be published.⁹

People in Kumkapi are mostly undocumented and though later many people assured me that the police didn't disturb them, they nevertheless **didn't have the feeling of safety**.

During my later interviews there were also some other doubtful responses, in particular those related to income questions. For instance, an Armenian woman employer who worked at a fur shop on the bases of a joint business or as they say "*ortakh mtats*" (having a share) with a Turkish partner, said that her income was 1000 USD, while the salaries of her co-workers, who were attracting visitors and crying out "*Esti hametseq*" (welcome here) at the same shop, was around 600 USD.

But over the course of the intensive time spent in Kumkapi almost every day for about two months, I have thoroughly studied the life and lifestyle of the Armenian migrants. This included time spent in interviews, communicating with them in different places like in the church yard, out for a coffee or at a dinner table, where I had the opportunity to observe the information I had gathered from a different angle.¹⁰ This time passed communicating enabled me to position myself for our upcoming interviews as an insider due to the participant observation that took place alongside the interviewees' typical life and lifestyle. As a result, people responded to questions more freely and openly by friendly sharing the issues that disturbed them. After all, I was also an Armenian, one who was speaking their language;¹¹ more specifically, I was one of them.

⁹ See Preface

¹⁰ There is no universal truth and any information can be considered as subjective. But any response that was doubtful for me, I have tried to verify through included observations and other sources, as well as other migrants, experts, etc. In addition, when I received similar responses from several people, it served as a basis for conclusions.

¹¹ In this case by saying "language", I mean not Armenian language but the culture.



An old building in Kumkapi

My Turkish colleagues think that being one of them helps in easily approaching people, building lasting relations and gathering reliable information. This is true in some cases because the Armenian migrants would hardly say to a Turkish researcher whatever they think about Turkish people. In the meantime I could write a booklet of aphorisms entitled "*a Turk is a Turk*," based on the answers to the questions regarding the Turks. Some of the notable ones are presented below:

- there are no good Turks
- the good Turk is like a cold snake: as soon as it's warmed up, it will bite
- the Turk can't be good for Armenians
- turks aren't good even for themselves

For, we both are from Armenia, hence we share the same culture.

- a Turk's brother doesn't go to his brother's house when he is out, as if he comes home—he will kill his brother since brothers don't even trust each other in terms of their wives
- the Turk fed and helped out in his country for 10 years, but make friends with your enemy and never put the stick down
- if you trample a Turk's foot, he will get rid of you. After all, they are Tajiks, and a Turk is a Turk
- a Turkish doctor healed my son and saved him from dying. Let God take care of his children, but I hate that Turk as well. As he is a Turk, it's natural
- if you trample a Turk's foot, he will trample your head
- turks are a bloody nation—if you prick them with a thorn, they will strike you with a knife. The one who tramples their feet, will have their head trampled by them
- a Turk is a Turk
- a Turk is a Turk
- a Turk is a Turk...

I don't think they would have shared these sayings with a Turkish researcher. On the other hand they would have talked with a non-Armenian researcher more freely, while my being one of them hindered them from letting me into their personal space, as we would later no longer be on equal footing.

The consciousness of most of these people has developed in Soviet Armenia where the principles of class equality were championed and almost no difference between social strata was discerned. There were no servants and landlords in the Soviet Union and in that respect, being a servant was regarded as an extremely humiliating job. As a result, it was difficult for them to talk about the job they do with someone who shares the same cultural consciousness.

A migrant who was washing dishes in one of the cafeterias in Samatya, and who during Soviet times was a dancer in the ethnographic dance group adjacent to one of the factories, and had traveled to the Soviet camp countries in the 80s, covered her face in the middle of the interview and began to sob:

"My position has lowered. There is a huge difference between who I was in Armenian and who I am here. I don't like it. I have been working in such conditions that can't hold my tears. I worked in a hotel in Antalya for two years; it seems that you live someone else's life when you come from another world and step into such a life, i.e. you work as a slave. Psychologically I feel humiliated."

There was cilantro on the counter for sale, and I became happy. Even though in some supermarkets in Istanbul they sell cilantro, in order to be called cilantro it needs to have the smell and taste of cilantro as much as a Bedouin needs water in a desert.

The elderly lady continued to cast curses when I asked the price of the cilantro.

"One lira," the woman replied with the same indifference as she immediately stopping cursing.

"It's a normal price," I thought to myself and bought two bunches.

I came to Eminönü with Anahit by ferry from Kadıköy, and afterwards we went to Kumkapi by bus. The road paved through the Bosphorus, and it was a perfect sunny day; apart from the sea, the yellow rays of the sun have gilded the day, our moods and probably many other things, too, which yet had no importance for Anahit.

"See this?" asked Anahit, pointing to the magnificent view along the Bosphorus. *"I wouldn't replace all this with all the, all the, all the ruins of my Lennagan after the earthquake"*.

Anahit was from Gyumri and hadn't been home for precisely nine years. Life never did stop and time in Gyumri was going ahead with the same accuracy as in Istanbul. Another 30-year-old migrant recounted that it took her five years after coming to Istanbul to realize that she was not 20 years old anymore.

"It is like entering into an open door and seeing it shut behind you. Like someone closes your ears and you are in sort of a vacuum. You think you can open the door again and go back, and I used to think for years that I'll go back, and my life will continue the way it used to be, because I felt twenty years old and because my life stopped at that point. But one morning I woke up and realized that five years had passed and that I seem to be living another life. Then my children were born and now I am thirty and it just hit me that the door closed in a kind of different way," she explained.

Svet thought those days wouldn't last long, that they would soon end and that she would wake up at home.

For some reason, it never happened. And it had only one explanation: Svet was in Istanbul, 1500 km away from her homeland, **with thousands of dollars of debt**, the threats of her brother's commander with a broken jaw, and a **feeling of uncertainty about the future**.

Meanwhile Anahit, in fact, bought an apartment. She has four children, is sending all her income to Armenia, and that is still not enough.

"I bought an apartment in Armenia but never saw it or lived in it. I dream of going and sleeping in the apartment that I bought. But, see, how I can work there, and especially in Gyumri, if I go back?" she was lamenting the whole time. *"Many miss and dream of shiny and wonderful Armenia. Missing is our greatest pain, many of us hold the dream of going back to Armenia, having a good job and living there. Physically we are here but our mind and dreams are there. Me, I have four youngsters at home. No idea about what's going on there, who comes, who goes. Before we were a slave to dignity and honor, now I don't know what we have become."*

She spoke about cultural differences and pointed out that she always hangs her woolen blankets and bedding in the sun, washes them and beats the wool: *"I want to sleep in my bed instead of these rotten Turkish beds. We used to take care of our woolen blankets, keep them clean. But*

those Turks don't do anything, they might only throw it away when something needs to be done."

Anahit is a tiny little woman with a strict posture and neat appearance. Her short cut hair is carefully done. It would have never occurred to me that a woman of her age and rank would clean the floor on her knees. But she did. Currently she is taking care of a person with mental problems, which is considered to be a hard work.

While living in Istanbul I met many people and conducted more than 40 individual interviews but I was particularly impressed with Anahit not because she was the first migrant I met in a foreign city, but because of her impressive speech flavored with interesting observations as she was trying to analyze the world and find the place of Armenians and Turks in it.

"We have been hostages of Turks for centuries and we still are. The new generation is clever, but they still do things in the old style," she said, *"We work hard, but we are all Gigors¹² here and I am sure eighty percent are in that situation with no objection. There are places where the worker is sent to eat separately, but if you don't let me near the table with you, then why do you eat what I cook?"*

In Anahit's opinion Armenians are not born to enjoy, but to work and get pleasure from work, while Turks, who don't like to work, know how to make others work.

"Armenians were born to work hard and be satisfied with the results. We work for them. I am very dissatisfied with them, but I keep my emotions in secret, because they at least treat us kindly and because of this, we work," she stated several times.

Finally we reached Kumkapı and went to the apartment where Anahit lived with her 7 friends during her day off, or as they say in Turkish,

¹² The hero of the short story "Giqor" by Armenian writer Hovhannes Tumanyan. Giqor works in a shop and attracts customers. Because of his natural frankness and naivety he often gets beaten and stays hungry, and later he turns ill and dies.



An Armenian cargo office based in Kumkapi

during the days of *izin*.¹³ It was a cold and unattractive apartment with faded walls and the air of abandonment. There was nobody in the three-room apartment with everybody at work, and each of them came there once a week, on the day of *izin*. The kitchen looked as if it had been bombed not long ago. There was a scale on the floor of the living room and I used my chance to measure my weight once again feeling alarmed that living in Istanbul had cost me some additional weight. We had different concerns but I was trying not to show it and that was the reason I visited her dressed casually. After all I was a woman sharing the same language and culture with her, thus I didn't want us to differ too much.

I later saw similar scales in other apartments. This was a symbolic sign, because **migrants along with money always send something to Armenia**, including olive oil, washing powder, new or old clothes,

¹³ *Izin* is the day off for migrants; "*izin vermek*" which means to ask for permission. Once a week they have an *izin* day which is also paid.

etc, and they need to weigh the baggage first to know how much they should pay.

Different goods could be seen everywhere. It had the aura of a station, which it was exactly. Later I went to other apartments as well, where you could feel that people lived there, while this apartment served as a shelter for one night a month. And it's an open question whether those 8 people were ever there together.

It was at this moment that I understood why our women avoided inviting me to their place. Though later in the course of the study I was hosted many times by some of them, I initially felt reluctance from the women to conduct our interviews in their homes. I talked to some of them in the churchyard; some invited me to a café. They were happy to host me and wouldn't let me pay the bill. That gave them inner satisfaction. This was because living in Istanbul they still could afford doing a favor for their compatriot in a café.

I stayed at Anahit's place for two hours; the hours of anxiety. She had little time, very little time. New Year's was approaching and she hadn't taken her *izin* days for three weeks. With a thousand things in mind to do, she was speaking about her life, her sons, Armenia and her future.

"I'd feel myself crumbled, but I'll get accustomed, we always get accustomed to anything as long as our country does not call us back and give us a place," she said and added with an equivocal glance, "*I work with a pure heart, and I will go back on my own initiative only when physically totally exhausted and unable to carry my faith. This is when I will go to Armenia.*"

Nivart talked of this phenomenon: "*This is a nice thing, you know, when a woman knowing she has several years to live, devotes her life to organize her children's lives. Not everyone is able to make such a sacrifice.*"

But this idea seemed terrifying. Nobody knows what the next dawn will bring, and **some of these women live here alone with nobody by their side.**



Bezcian School in Kumkapı

*“You are here in nowhere, not a **“first-sort”** human. Well, if someone’s neck is cut, there is no one held responsible. Two years ago a woman died of heart attack on the way to the church. No one came closer to see what happened. Later, the Patriarchate took care of the issue. She was a lonely woman with not even a single person to leave some money,”* another migrant later recalled.

Anahit stood up. It was time to go and she had to see a doctor that day. Her feet hurt.

“There is not a single woman above forty without knee pain: everybody’s knees hurt,” she said bitterly. *“We leave our health here, because we are the cheapest labor force. They have native/local cleaning ladies who come and get 100-150 TL for one cleaning. We get 600 USD for day and night’s work. We get older with them and get the same illnesses as they have.”*

This is how my interview with Anahit ended, and it gave floor to further reflections. This single interview outlined all the questions by which to base my research.

I have been in Kumkapı many times since that day and have examined all its nooks and crannies, but I went to the “*Table-covered Street*” only once for a meeting.

Kumkapı turned out not to be Rio de Janeiro.¹⁴ Moreover, Kumkapı had a bad reputation and all Polis Armenians formerly living there had long ago moved to more prosperous neighborhoods like Feriköy, Bakırköy, Kurtuluş, Yeşilköy, etc. However, the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Bezchian School, three Armenian churches, as well as the school “*Hrant Dink*” for children from Armenia in the basement of the Protestant Church are still located there. And in one way or another, Kumkapı still holds secrets of the Armenian context hidden deep inside its soul with the irrevocably lost life stories of women from Armenia now added upon it.

I never went to the “*Table-covered Street*” again. I wanted to keep the never-fading picture of the charming Kumkapı fresh in my mind.

¹⁴ A famous mem from a very popular Soviet film “*Gold Calf*”. It is used in cases when the expectations are not.



CHAPTER II

MIGRATION IN ARMENIA AND THE CAUSES OF COMING TO TURKEY

The opening of the borders covered by the “iron curtain” with the collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a deep recession, and the number of people leaving for abroad to find jobs, who already during the years of the Soviet Union had used to go on khopon,¹ began to increase abruptly, reaching high figures for Armenia.

According to different sources, the number of people who have left Armenia with no intention of returning is around 1,300,000² since 1991 till now.

The most active migration period is that of 1991-1995 when the number of people leaving Armenia was approximately 610,000-620,000.³ In 1995-1996 when life in Armenia began to normalize and communal household conditions were improved as a result of the flow of the first transfers by those who had left Armenia, economic life enlivened and the outflow of people decreased; between 1995-2001 around 250,000 people left Armenia with no intention of returning. The picture of migration in the new independent Armenia during different periods is detailed in “*Migration and Skills: the Armenian National Report*”⁴ conducted in 2011-2012.

¹ Khopon is a term typical of the Soviet period of Armenia and it means “to go abroad for temporary work for 6-9 months and mainly working in the construction field”. The application of the term is connected with the adoption of the USSR’s program of the 1950-1960 on virgin lands; khopon means “fallow”. On khopanchis, read the research “*Armenian Migrants in Turkey: History of a Journey*” by Nivart Taşçı, pp.19-45

² Ruben Eganyan, an Expert on Migration, Interview, Yerevan 2014

³ Aghasi Tadevosyan, “*Migration and Routine*”, pp.17-19

⁴ European Training Foundation and CRRC Armenia, pp. 15-17
http://www.crc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/projects/Migration_and_skills_2011/Arm-Migration%20and%20Skills%20Report.pdf

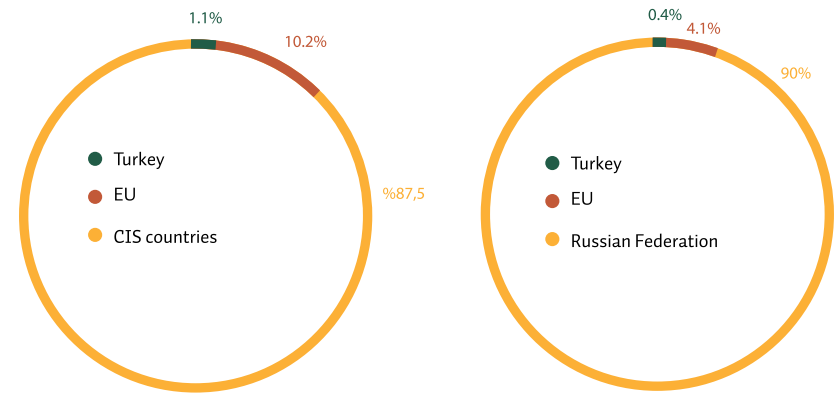
Though the RA government has adopted a policy concepts to normalize the migration sphere and to encourage repatriation migration for 2012–2016 by developing an action plan, the number of people leaving Armenia and not coming back, which has stopped for a few years, has again begun to increase in recent years.

According to the latest “*Report on the Household Survey on Migration*”⁶ conducted in 2013 and preconditioned by the consequences of the world financial-economic crisis, between 2007–2013 30,000 people annually left Armenia and never returned, and this figure stands for approximately 1% of Armenia’s population. According to the findings of the CRRC-Caucasus Barometer’s⁷ 2013 data, to the question of whether they would leave the country if they had the opportunity, 60% of the 2000 people surveyed responded yes, while 39% responded no.

2.1. The Preferable Final Destination Countries for Armenians

For Armenian labor migrants the Russian Federation was and still is the primary destination, however Turkey can also be found on the list. Armenians have begun to leave for Istanbul since the beginning of the 1990s but during the survey there were some people who had left even before 1990 and settled down only some years later since then.

Since Turkey was only a destination of a small percentage of migrants, the RA National Statistics Service had not collected any data before. Only in the latest survey⁸ there is some data on this destination, according to which, Turkey’s portion as a final destination country is 0.4%. The Russian Federation continues to be the first destination with 90.6%, and the next largest target area is the EU with 4.1%.



01. Desirable Countries for Armenian Labour Migrants

02. Destination Countries for Armenian Labour Migrants

It is noteworthy that according to another survey,⁹ 1.1% of the respondents expressed a wish to migrate to Turkey. The CIS countries have the figure of 87.5%, while the EU countries have 10.2%.

2.2. Why Turkey?

Though Turkey is an adversary country for Armenia and there are no diplomatic relations between the two countries, many surveys state that people always prefer to go to wherever there are local communities¹⁰ as the labor migrants expect some support from them. When the EU adopted a charter on migration and refugees, there was such a viewpoint that there no longer would exist any obvious factor for people to prefer one country over another, as the law envisaged the same normalization process for all countries. However, it turned out that migrants prefer to move to places where there are local communities, it doesn’t matter how good or bad the defense system of that country is.

⁵ https://www.e-gov.am/u.files/file/decrees/kar/2011/11/11_1593.pdf

⁶ International Organization for Migration, RA National Statistics Service http://www.un.am/up/library/Household%20survey_arm.pdf, pp. 77–79

⁷ http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2013/CB2013_public%20presentation_English.pdf <http://www.crrc.am/caucasusbarometer/documentation?lang=en>

⁸ International Organization for Migration, RA National Statistics Service, 2013 http://www.un.am/up/library/Household%20survey_arm.pdf, p. 85

⁹ An assessment of Migration in RA through an optional research, 2013, Armenian- Russian Slavonic University http://rau.am/uploads/blocks/3/31/3115/files/Migration_Project_Report_Final%281%29.pdf, p. 74

¹⁰ Bertan Tokuzlu [Professor at Bilgi University Human Rights Center] Interview. Istanbul. 18 December 2014 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/58966/anorinakan-migrantneri-kyanqy-turqiyayum-kdzhvarana.html/>



The flags of Armenia and Turkey in an Armenian cargo office

When Armenians from Armenia came to Istanbul for the first time, the Istanbul Armenians were happy to have an Armenian speaker in their home. But, later as more Armenians from Armenia came, the more problems occurred, and a gap emerged between the two communities. To understand this gap we need to take into consideration the fact that they belong to different classes.¹¹

Polis Armenians (Istanbul is best known as Polis among Armenians) who hire Armenians from Armenia are from the middle or upper class, while Armenians from Armenia usually represent the lower class.

Another problem is that the migrants from Armenia are middle-aged and their conscious was developed in Soviet Armenia where class difference wasn't so obvious, and there were no landlords and no ser-

vants. In this respect, the fact of working as a servant at their compatriots' houses is humiliating for Armenians from Armenia.

"When I came here, I was hired to work at a house and became a servant. Your life is changed, passing through hardships. It is very painful to have lived a different life and then to come here to work as a servant. I can't get adapted to this life; I can't find my place here. My place is in my country and my Armenia. I was a person dealing with art in Armenia and I was very proud but here I am the first one to leave the table and wash the glasses.

My position has lowered here. There is a huge difference between who I was in Armenia and who I am here, I don't like it. Here I let myself be humiliated, but why? I don't know-I haven't thought about it. If they come to my place, they even won't wash a glass, but if I go to the same people's houses and do their housework, they will think I am obliged to do that. I ask myself "Why am I doing that?" and I don't know the answer.

And people don't acknowledge it appropriately and they misunderstand. I have been working here in such conditions that I couldn't hold my tears. I worked in Antalya for two years - it seems that you live someone else's life, that coming from another world, you step into such a life, work, i.e. you work as a servant. Psychologically I feel humiliated." **57-year-old woman from Yerevan**

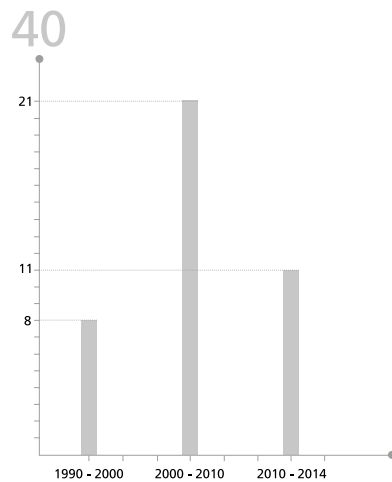
"Educated people always feel uneasy. There are lots of people in Armenia who want to hire someone who will do housework, but the women don't agree, i.e. they do that work in Turkey but not in Armenia because they are proud, nonsensically proud. Though, as far as I understand, such kind of work is becoming usual in Armenia as well." **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

"I am humiliated here very much and feel bad that though I have to clean the dirt under their feet, they shout at me; what has happened to your life? It passed. Why should I live here for 10 years? What have I done to deserve this? Who are you for them? You are their servant. Though I have never washed my stockings, now I am washing other's pants. The neglect... your work starts after his/hers - you clean up both the underwear and stockings. It is better now as there are baskets to put there. I feel uneasy as it's not mine. I want my Armenia, I want my country." **45-year-old woman from Yerevan**

¹¹ Aykut Öztürk [Turkish Cultural Anthropologist] Interview. Istanbul. 12 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58246/anthropologist-rejects-turk-remains-a-turk-adage-all-turks-a-rent-monsters.html>

Another contradiction is that regarding culture and customs, there is a great difference between Polis Armenians and Armenians from Armenia. Knowing the Armenian language has not been enough for them to get along well with each other. Their approaches regarding speaking, cooking and cleaning are different.¹² These two types of Armenians—one of them having lived in Turkey, and the other one in the Soviet Union for decades—are bearers of different cultures.

“Depending on a person’s outlook, there is a difference in understanding. The difference between an eastern Armenian and a western one has always found its expression in behavior, literature; that separation has always been there and the influence of different cultures in different countries has been added to it, and therefore, they have become more separated.” **28-year-old man from Abovyan**



03. Entrance in Turkey

Because of this and other reasons, less than friendly relations were developed between migrants from Armenia looking for a job in Istanbul and Polis Armenians. Nevertheless, because of the language barrier, at first all migrants from usually Armenia try to find a job with Polis Armenians, and then after learning the language, they also work in the homes of Turks. However, more precisely, they prefer to work at Turks’ homes.

The main reason for migrating to Turkey is the fact that it is the fastest and easiest route to solving financial issues. The flow of Armenians into Istanbul that began in the 1990s was of particular interest to middle-aged women who, not being able to overcome the problems

¹² Aykut Öztürk [Turkish Cultural Anthropologist] Interview. Istanbul. 12 January 2015 <http://hetq.am/eng/news/58246/anthropologist-rejects-turk-remains-a-turk-adage-all-turks-a-rent-monsters.html>



In the cargo office

that emerged from financial issues during the first years of an independent Armenia, found the urgent solution to the problem by living in Turkey. Turkey was a cheap, easy and close country, and there was also a labor market for women there.¹³

“Because it is close and the travel cost is cheaper, I could have returned back home whenever I didn’t want to stay anymore and couldn’t adapt, no matter how difficult it would have been. I have come here as I had had many debts in Armenia – I had sold my house, summer house, everything, but couldn’t pay back my debts. I had a shop and I was a shopkeeper who had emptied the shop over two years. My house was estimated to be worth 5000 USD, while I had a debt of 28,000 USD. The first years were very difficult. I was receiving calls from Armenia with a request to send some money as I had left debts behind. At first I earned 400 USD-I was

¹³ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities] Interview. Istanbul. 16 January 2015 <http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>



The Yerevan-Istanbul bus in Aksaray bus station

hired by a family and up till now I have been working there.” **45-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“If you have a debt of 2000 USD in Armenia, you have to take the path of sojourn because it is impossible to save money in Armenia.” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

If most people have some acquaintances or relatives before coming to Turkey, others, only having heard that there are jobs in Istanbul, take a bus and come to Turkey, without knowing anyone. Many people mentioned that they had come to Turkey because they had had no other way out as they had not known how to make their living.

“I came here in tears and cried along the way; it took me three days to arrive here. Our next door neighbor used to come to Turkey for trading and he was telling us that it was profitable, etc., and I thought I should also go, and so I did, without knowing anyone and having no idea how and what I should do. I didn’t know the language and I thought I would stay in a hotel. A girl on the bus asked me where I was going and who was supposed to meet me, and then she said she would take me with her to her place as she had a flat in Istanbul. In those years the buses used to run to Kumkapı, and her husband and friends met us and took me with them. We had some meals, and chatted a bit. That girl’s mother told me that they would find a job for me, and just the next day they took me to a workplace.

The woman’s husband took me to a hotel and spoke to the owner. On the same day I started working, cleaning a room. I was cleaning the bathroom when the owner came in, entered the bathroom and closed the door. He approached me by hugging me from behind. I pushed him away and went downstairs in tears. The husband argued with the owner and took me back to his place. Then there was an Armenian grandma and I started working at her place.” **57-year-old woman from Yzerevan**

And though Armenians from Armenia who have settled down in Istanbul are different, mostly people who have no opportunities to go elsewhere come here.

“When I took the bus for the first time, everyone began smoking. It was very unusual for me. And as if it wasn’t enough for me that I was shocked

as I was traveling with an unknown group of people, they didn’t behave very femininely. Whoever got in the bus, began to curse; they were taking cigarettes from their bags. They told me if I stayed in Istanbul, I would learn to smoke, too. I had never worn trousers in Armenia, and never do up till now.” **55-year-old woman from Artashat**

“Because in order to go elsewhere we need thousands of dollars, but people spend only 50 dollars to come here because it is close, as if going to Shrgan-yin from Nork-Masiv.”¹⁴ **65-year-old man from 65 Gyumri**

“Whoever had money, sold their houses and went to Europes (an informal way in Armenian to refer to European countries) with 3000-4000 USD; I came here with 50 USD. I wanted to go to America, but they demanded 30,000 USD from each of us. If I had so much money, why would I have wanted to leave? There are people who have come here without any money, by paying for the bus ticket later.” **50-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

¹⁴ Districts in Yerevan



CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF MIGRANTS AND THEIR SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

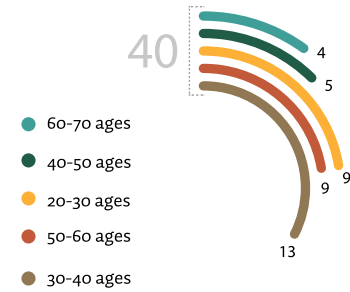
Armenians from Armenia working in Istanbul can be categorized into four different groups, which despite having similar problems as any irregular migrant might have, such as employment, language issues, human rights abuses and the issues of legal residence, also have group-specific problems and needs.

3.1. Four Different Groups

- a) There is a group of women working in Istanbul mostly in homes. Their families or a part of the family are in Armenia, and they are here to earn money covering the expenses of their relatives in Armenia. The latter are those women who do the work which attracts migrants to Istanbul. The age range of the group is wide and may include women and girls from 20 to 70, and sometimes even older than 70, but the core representation is formed by women from 50 to 60.

“A sister may work here in order to keep her brother’s family, while the brother might be smoking all day and not even working. And for some reason, everybody got used to that idea. There was a woman aged 75 who was taking care of a 85-year-old woman, and she died abroad. We went to Armenia to accompany the corpse for the funeral, and her son, a 40-year-old, arrogant guy who was always smoking perkily, never suffered for his mother’s death but for the fact that they lost their income.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“I came here to cure my head, but I never got to it. We operated my grandmother’s eyes, now my brother has problems that need to be fixed. Problems don’t end.” **26-year-old woman from Ararat**



04. Age Group

ing to my children's wellbeing. I have no higher aim in this life and enjoy being helpful. I also help my son's daughter. I haven't been to my country for 7 years since I've been here, but my daughter and grandchildren have visited me for several days." **61-year-old woman from Stepanavan**

"My main concern is being far from Armenia and missing my children. And though we speak by phone it's not the same, you can't feel the warmth. A grandchild is born in Armenia and you can't see him/her." **60-year-old woman from Stepanavan**

"I now live in nostalgia and pain. I work for my children, but every single thought might be a reason for an illness. Well, in the end I will go and find my place in my fatherland. But I pray to God to stay a bit longer to help my sons settle down." **66-year-old woman from 66 Gyumri**

"There are women who haven't seen their new-born grandchildren or have bought houses in Armenia but have never seen it or slept in it." **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

Women of this group work for upper and middle class representatives among Polis Armenians and Turks. For the new generation of young Armenian migrants, it's not acceptable to do the same jobs that their parents do.²

The main problem within this group is the strong feeling of longing as they are here alone, working and sending their income to Armenia.¹

"My two grandchildren study, we need to pay for their education and the dowry for marriage. I will help as much as I can. I have to stay, happiness for me means contributing

"Young people of 25-30 do not accept serving day and night at somebody's house which might be acceptable for a 50-year-old person. The latter might think that she has some 10-20 years ahead and might as well sacrifice these years for her children. This is a very beautiful and noble concept and requires a big heart. Polis Armenians won't understand and accept this. They call Armenians from Armenia **aferist**,³ but there's no need to call them this, as aferists won't come and clean your shit. Years pass but this approach hasn't changed and I know it won't."

Women normally live in the house they work for so they aren't paying rent or other utility expenses. But this means willingly subjecting oneself to an arrest, as not having their own house means they follow the rules of the one they live in. This is sometimes very hard, as they work like a slave from morning till night and can't go to sleep until the house owner hasn't left. Mostly being an irregular migrant makes Istanbul for them something like a prison: they live imprisoned in prison.⁴

"I wanted to go somewhere after work but I didn't know where to go so went to sleep. Where could I sleep at night if I have no place? I lived like a robot and Turks kept saying not to take my izin, but if I stayed inside the four walls that day also, I would die. I used to go out, walk and come back at night to sleep." **42-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Women find different solutions to this problem, but it depends on their resources. For instance, one of the migrant women who works at the house of a rich Polis Armenian lives on the first floor of the same house which was designated for her. She also arranged to work till 6, which means that after that she is free to organize her life as she wants.

"I live on the first floor, I finish my work at 6 and leave for my home, but those who live with the owners can't go to sleep unless the owner has gone to bed." **55-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Instead, some women organize their work schedule differently and do not work for one particular house, but have a list of costumers and go to clean their houses once a week. And as this list is long, it means

¹ Bagrat Estukyan [Editor of the Armenian department of "Agos" newspaper published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014

² Nivart Taşçı [Polis Armenian researcher] Interview. Istanbul. 18 February 2015

³ *Aferist* – a word which entered into the Armenian vocabulary in Soviet times meaning to gain profit from people for speculative purposes

⁴ Nivart Taşçı [Polis Armenian researcher] Interview. Istanbul. 18 February 2015



A telephone office in Kumkapi, a place mostly visited by Armenian migrants



Armenian Patriarchate based in Kumkapi

that this woman works every day but is not busy all day long, as she is free as soon as she is done with the work.

“This option is better, because you can earn more money and I am freer; my children come and I can host them. But not everyone can do the same cleaning as I can and not everyone’s work is appreciated like mine is. You go once or twice and if they don’t like how you clean, they won’t take you. But once somebody likes the way you work, they inform others and the list of costumers increases.” **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**

The majority of women don’t have this chance and they have one free day a week, *izin*, which is also remunerated. Each spends this day differently: many go to Armenian churches, which become a sort of a place to communicate, and often times they even make new acquaintances and connections. They go to the hospital in case they have health issues, transportation agencies, because they always send some luggage to their families (clothing for instance, both old and new), washing powder, and oil and so on. Before

New Year’s they send everything necessary for the New Years’ celebration.

“We couldn’t survive in Armenia. Five members of the family were working but getting 60-70,000 AMD per person and that wasn’t enough for living; a big family, living expenses, birthdays, school, higher education... so we became drowned in debt. What I earned here for two years, I wouldn’t have obtained in Yerevan, so now my children go to a good school. And I send everything from here: olives-green, black, crushed, and nuts, etc.” **37-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Although often times there are good relations with employers, women appreciate the importance of personal space, so some of them gather and rent a house together so that they can have a place to sleep on *izin*, and common space to communicate.

“They are my family, but I get tired. I want to go and speak to my sister, to share something with her; someone comes from her village and goes for shopping for their grandchildren and others. This

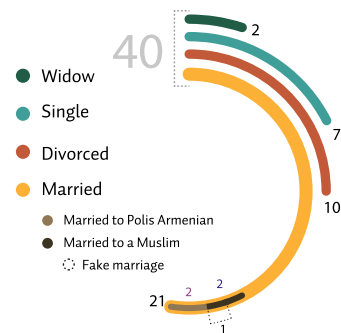
day is important for everybody.” **45-year-old woman from Yerevan**

There are cases when somebody rents a flat and as she doesn't sleep in the house where she works, she provides her flat for the so-called “izin-takers.”⁵

“Once I lived in somebody's house and felt uneasy. I like having everything in my place, having good clothing, spending my money on me. And I don't like working in the evenings. As 7 o'clock gets closer I seem to be all nerves. I can work all day, but in the evening when husbands get home and I have to work in front of them and wait until they go to sleep, I feel like an outsider, I don't want to be there at that time, I want to be at my place.”

57-year-old woman from Yerevan

- b) Another group of women live here with their husbands and have children. Some of them do the same work as those from the first group of women, but as the age range of this group is from 20 to 35 years old, some of them are also involved in the service industry-hotels, shops, and cafés. The majority either doesn't work or works a light schedule as they have to care for their families.



05. Marital Status

“I can go out and stay at home in both cases feeling like an Armenian woman, but I know that this is a faster way and I might not have another similar opportunity, so I decided to work and support my husband. I don't like this. What woman would like to work all day long, then come to home at night, do housework, take care of the children, and so on. In Armenia you wait for your husband to come home after work, take care of him and look after the children, do the housework, the cooking, etc.”

23-year-old woman from Hrazdan

⁵ An *Izin* taker is a woman who looks for a place to sleep at night. As not everybody can find people to rent a house together but everybody has an *izin* day, some women rent a house and keep *Izins* who pay daily rent for an overnight sleep. In such houses even if friendships are formed, still the women pay even for leaving their luggage there.

This group arose as a result of family migration, as those women came either with their mothers and married an Armenian citizen, a Polis Armenian or a Muslim, or they married someone who went to find a wife in Armenia. Their husbands came with their mothers who belong to the first group. There may be exceptions, but the second group of women is formed mainly as a result of family migration.

These women face slightly different problems as they have their closest family members with them-children, husbands, and in most cases, in-laws. Their primary need is an apartment and thus a well-paid job,⁶ as they need to spend major part of their income on living expenses. They gather in families and rent a flat together to share the expenses.

“Fifty to sixty-year-old women come first, find a place to live, and then send for their children. Or mother-in-laws come, find a job and send for family members. Then they rent a flat and live together in one place.” **37-year-old woman from Yerevan**

3.1.1. Challenge: Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian Orthography as a Wedge Between Schools

One of the primary problems of this group is education, as women are in Istanbul with their children or their children are born here. Though Armenians from the Republic of Armenia are to a certain extent isolated and communicate mostly amongst themselves, the children start to speak Turkish due to their environment. For Armenian migrant parents who see Armenia as their final destination for life, this is a major issue. This adds to their burden as they also have to pay for school education.⁷

“Then there's a new challenge to face: you should force your child to speak Armenian. Here, my child is deprived of playing in the yard, and even in summer it is dark after seven or eight o'clock.” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

⁶ See Subchapter 2.2

⁷ Bagrat Estukyan [Editor of the Armenian department of “Agos” newspaper published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014



Armenian Evangelical church of Gedik-Paşa where the Hrant Dink School is situated

“My primary problem is my children’s education: my son is seven years old and I intend to send him to my mother. But my daughter is in the third grade. When she gets to the eighth grade I will leave from here. My daughter likes studying and wants to go for higher education, and later she will blame me for going after money instead of giving her a chance to study.” **34-year-old woman from Karabakh**

Another issue related to children is the absence of yards/play grounds (Yerevan has many) as well as the parents’ disapproval for their children to deal with strangers.

“We are deprived of yards; there are no yards in Istanbul. My sister lives in Avan.⁸ We went there and my child was playing freely in the yard. He was so excited to feel free that he was shaking my hand and kissing it because he was out and playing freely, which we don’t have here, as we tell them not to speak to strangers.” **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**



Students of the Hrant Dink School

The issue of children’s education was partially solved due to the efforts of Reverend Grigor Aghabalyan of the Armenian Protestant Church located in Getik Paşa (Ağabalıoğlu). Before, he had tried to speak to Armenian migrant children in Armenian, yet occasionally, the children would respond to him in Turkish. *“I told myself that if local Armenians have lost their Armenian identity then the same is going to happen with new migrants from Armenia.”*⁹ He became acquainted with Heriqnaz Avagyan who had come to Istanbul to work and who used to be an Armenian language and literature teacher. Due to her and Alex Uzuroğlu’s efforts, they established a school, which has been open since the 2003-2004 academic year, then with only 4-7 pupils. Over the years the school has managed to expand with the help of benefactors from the Polis Armenian community, as well as with support from the project envisaged by a mandate from the Caritas international organization. Now there are approximately 150 pupils studying from kindergarten to middle school. The school fee is 60 USD per month.

⁸ District in Yerevan

⁹ <http://theanalyticon.com/?p=4120>



The canteen at the Hrant Dink School

The school is a basic school and works in accordance with the program of the RA Ministry of Education. The language of studies is Eastern Armenian. In 2010 it was named after Hrant Dink. Raquel Dink, his widow, presented the school with half of the amount gained as a result of the case in ECHR “*Dink Family v. Turkey*.”

The school is a very important center for Armenian migrant parents. Aside from getting acquainted with each other and creating ties, they can also leave their children there until 6 o’clock, because many parents work and can’t afford taking their children earlier. Thus there is a set shift at the school until parents come and take their children.

The school named after Hrant Dink is the only one in Istanbul for other working migrant groups as well, because there is no other similar school for other migrant groups.¹⁰

¹⁰ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities] Interview. Istanbul. 16 January 2015 <http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>

Though children don’t get any final certificate when they leave school, the school provides them with a document sealed by Reverend Grigor Ağabalyan, which a pupil can further use in Armenia to continue their studies at high school or to get a graduation certificate in Armenia.¹¹

The Turkish Government is well aware of the existence of the school and recently received an invitation to be included on the list of the 16 Armenian schools in Istanbul and become the 17th, so that all the problems and issues that are being considered for Polis Armenian Schools can be taken into consideration for this one as well.¹² This invitation has until now remained a verbal one and is waiting to be discussed. Besides, in 2011¹³ the Turkish Ministry of education has accepted a decision according to which children of irregular Armenian migrants can also attend Polis Armenian schools under a guest-pupil status. They cannot receive graduation certificates from these schools either, but they would receive a document on the basis of which they could continue their studies in Armenia. Attending Polis Armenian schools is almost free of charge for Armenian migrants.

There are 16 local Armenian schools in Istanbul and only 4 of them are high schools; the others are primary schools. These 16 schools enroll 3500 pupils in total.

The decision to allow Armenian migrant children to study in Polis Armenian schools is one controversially accepted by both Polis Armenians and Armenians from Armenia.

*“It’s fake that they are studying at our schools, as they don’t get a diploma. Education is the most important thing, but they can’t get it this way. There is an Armenian community here but Armenian youngsters can’t study, and there is a problem with Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian.”*¹⁴

¹¹ Heriqnaz Avagyan [The headmaster of “Hrant Dink” school] Interview. Istanbul. 6 February 2015

¹² Heriqnaz Avagyan [The headmaster of “Hrant Dink” school] Interview. Istanbul. 6 February 2015

¹³ http://www.todayszaman.com/national/guest-student-status-does-not-respond-to-needs-of-armenian-migrants-children_259278.html

¹⁴ Sayat Tekir. [Member of the social movement “*Nor Zartonq*”] Interview. Istanbul. 27 February 2015



Students in the garden of the church during their open class

Because of the difference between Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian orthography parents prefer to take their children to the “Hrant Dink” school. But the conditions of this school can’t be compared to that of the Polis Armenian schools, because it is located in the basement of a church, there is not enough space and, very often, not enough ventilation.

Some migrants have different approaches to this issue stating that it would be better to adjust to their conditions to some extent.

“Some parents get confused over the two types of orthography, but then how can one manage to clean their houses if there is such miscommunication? It is an issue of getting accustomed—even brothers and sisters don’t get along easily with each other in a family.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

On the other hand, Polis Armenian schools are open until 4 o’clock, therefore they are more attended by children whose mothers are relatively free and can take their children home earlier.

*“At the beginning of the year there are a greater number of pupils—up to 30—but at the end of the year few are left—10 people—as mothers work late hours and the pupils can’t stay here. Our conditions are not sufficient to keep the students so late, that is why they take them mostly to Getik pasha.”*¹⁵

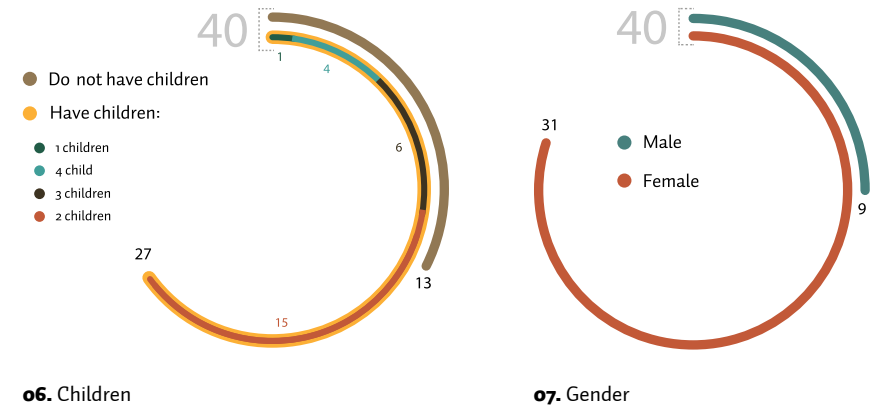
To solve this problem an employee of the Caritas humanitarian organization supporting the “Hrant Dink” school suggested to connect it with a Polis Armenian college because it is a main school, and besides, there is no gymnasium and other required facilities. However, the parents were against it during negotiations.

*“We became a link between the school and the community. Ateşyan would never go there before, but now due to us it has increased its visibility. We wanted to have a separate high school and keep the “Hrant Dink” school as basic school but parents were against it, saying that they didn’t want their children to go to Turkish schools and study Turkish history.”*¹⁶

¹⁵ A headmaster of Polis Armenian school. Interview. Istanbul. 22 January 2015

¹⁶ An employee of “Caritas” international organization. Interview. Istanbul. 13 February 2015

c) Men and children:¹⁷ Although it is mainly thought that the Armenian Community in Istanbul consists mostly of women, there are many men and children who are less visible.¹⁸



Besides the school-age children who mainly attend the “Hrant Dink” school or the Polis Armenian schools as guest pupils, some of them also work, mostly in the jewelry industry as well as in cafés.

There is also the prevailing opinion among men that in Istanbul there is work only for women, but there are men who work in factories and jewelry shops, are involved in trade, or do not work at all.

“May I be forgiven by all those fathers here who work, but there is a huge number of men who don’t work and justify it with the fact that there is no work. Whereas there is always work for women. So, after working like dogs all day, they come back home and there’s still work to be done around the house.” **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“There are people in Kumkapı who say there is no work, and once there is something they say that their honor won’t allow them to do it. Some of those lazy-bones escaped from the country, that’s why they

¹⁷ Problems and needs of migrants included in the groups c) and d) are not considered in the given research

¹⁸ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities]. Interview. Istanbul. 16 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>

are here. And they can't go back as they have problems. Well, some people came for other reasons, but lost their common sense because of drugs and became drug-addicts. This is how things are in Kumkapı.

Likewise, lazy-bone friends get together and rent a place, move from here to there, and often times quarrel with the owners because they can't pay their debts. Well, maybe by stealing or with some relative's help they go along like in Armenia in the 1990s, borrowing money to live. There are lots of such chicken coops in Kumkapı." **28-year-old man from Yerevan**

"My earnings are enough only for daily bread and water; there are more job opportunities for women here-no jobs for men. We have rented a flat and live there with another family, all together." **65-year-old man from Gyumri**

"You should be in good health in order to work in Istanbul. Here you can't save money if you do many jobs-women's salaries are higher and they manage to work." **34-year-old man from Vanadzor**

"The Armenians from Armenia are the ones who have lived here for at least 7 years, while the newcomers are the grandchildren or children of those who have settled down here earlier. And whenever someone gets married they say, "I should have my grandchild with her husband come here; let my grandchild work and her husband 'drive a sofa' (it conveys the meaning of doing nothing, being idle) or look after the child as his wife can go to work. Let our Armenia be happy with the fact that there are so many women here."¹⁹ **45-year-old woman from Yerevan**

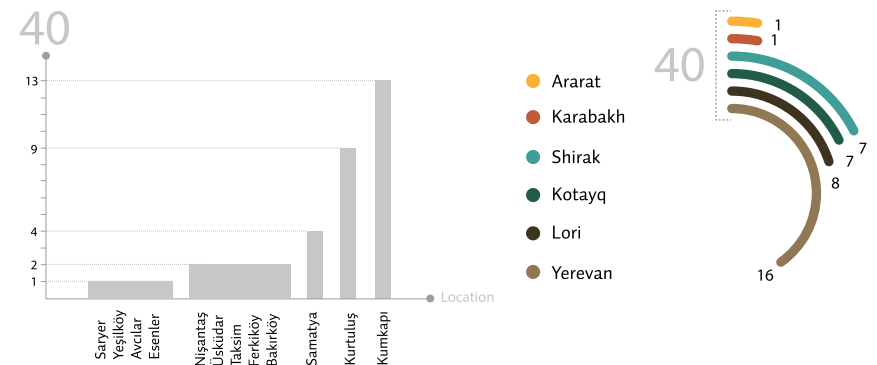
d) The fourth group is represented by women who are engaged in the business of prostitution and trafficking. They are mainly in Trabzon, Rise, Samsun and other seashore regions, though can be found in Istanbul as well, especially those engaged in prostitution. There is a widespread opinion that around the seashore regions many Georgian and Azeri girls introduce themselves as Armenian prostitutes since the latter are demanded among the nationalist Turks, and thus are paid twice more.²⁰

According to the report of 2014 by the US Department of State, Armenia is considered to be a source country for sex trafficking for Turkey and the Arab Emirates, while for labor trafficking it is the Russian Federation and again Turkey.²¹

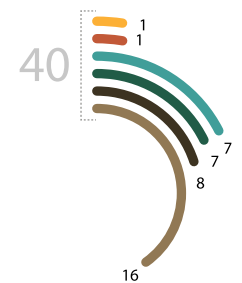
Like the migrants presented above, the women belonging to this group who are engaged not in trafficking but prostitution, and share the common problem with language barriers, visa and other legal issues, and human rights violations.

3.2. Kumkapı as a Meeting Point

Though Armenians from Armenia are spread all over Istanbul, a considerable number of them reside in Kumkapı. Here, not only Armenian but all other foreign migrants are centralized because flats are comparably cheaper here. Kumkapı is also located at a convenient crossroad for accessing different services such as, for instance, cargo and passenger transportation agencies.



08. Living Spaces in Istanbul



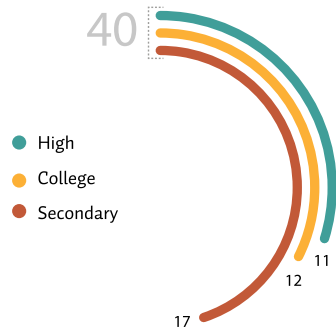
09. Residency in Armenia

The Armenian migrants prefer to live in Samatya, Şişli and Kurtuluş districts as well since accommodation is comparably cheap here. In addition, these districts are considered to be Armenian. But no matter

¹⁹ On the numbers of the Armenians from Armenia, see Subchapter 3.3

²⁰ Sayat Tekir [Member of the social movement "Nor Zartonq"] Interview. Istanbul. 27 February 2015

²¹ <http://hetq.am/arm/news/55407/hayastany-trafiqinqi-gtsov-arajin-khmbi-erkir.html/>
<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/armenia/231771/PDFs/tip2014.pdf>



10. Educational Background

where Armenians live in Istanbul, after all most of them meet each other in Kumkapı because their acquaintances and friends, as well as cargo agencies, are near the Patriarchate, the Mother Church.

Though the people described in all the groups above are of different educational levels and represent different classes, out of the migration potential of Armenia mainly representatives of the lower classes come to Istanbul, and in that respect, they have some reservations towards each other. Among families there is a tendency to become isolated from the general community of Armenians from Armenia. The latter usually try to rent apartments in the same blocks or districts to be close to each other.

“In my opinion, mainly the representatives of an idle layer of criminals, fugitives from the Army or people having some problems come here; those who have nothing to do in Armenia. But there are also women from good families who are perceived as strange people only because they are normal. In recent years more people from good families have been coming. At first when we came here, there were four families that we kept in touch with, and afterwards we rented flats all together on one block, isolating ourselves.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“We communicate more with those who are here with their families. But there are families that rent a block and live there with 15 families. We don’t communicate with them as in that case they mainly keep in touch with Turks, but those who are with families; they are more reserved and restrained.” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“When I came to Turkey, I was staying at a place that was inhabited by all kinds of people. There was a woman who used to cast curses and kick the door open. You have to create your own world-how can I tell her not to curse? And this lead to the fact that I was able to change the environment, because that woman would say: “Is this [woman] here?” i.e. if

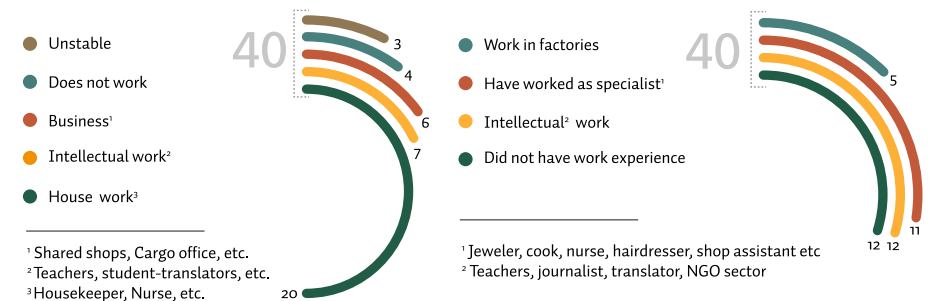
she was about to curse, she would look at me as it helped her to restrain and not to curse in my presence.”

46-year-old woman from Yerevan

“I don’t want to judge those people who have had to come here to work but when I see two women talking to each other, I feel like I should stop and ask how they are, but I don’t because I wouldn’t talk with them in Armenia either.” **38-year-old woman from Yerevan**

The Armenian migrants in Istanbul mainly do jobs that are considered the dirtiest and even though there are people who have professions, almost none of them work in them.

“I haven’t seen anyone from Armenia that could have had some achievements here, even if they had legal documents. You can go ahead two steps and that it; that’s the threshold that you cannot surpass. Our Armenians are mainly engaged in cleaning. Even for simple needs, when you go to see a doctor, you pay more.” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**



11. Work Areas in Istanbul

There are so called “offices” in Istanbul that have close relationships with landlords and act as intermediaries between landlords and women and earn money-half of the their first salary amount. There are two such famous offices in Kumkapı, though women who have many years of work experience also “settle businesses” among their circles, thus getting some money for it.

The jobs for women mainly include cleaning houses, ironing, looking after children, or a sick or old person. They get paid around 600-1000 USD for this kind of job; nevertheless, there are people who earn more.

12. Profession



¹ Shared shops, Cargo office, etc.
² Teachers, student-translators, etc.
³ Housekeeper, Nurse, etc.

¹ Jeweler, cook, nurse, hairdresser, shop assistant etc
² Teachers, journalist, translator, NGO sector



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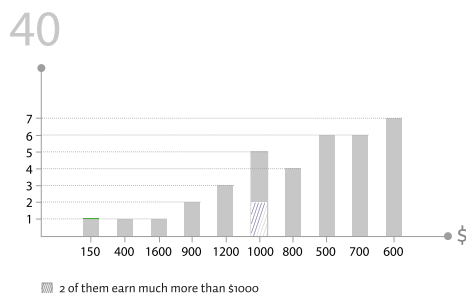
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An old building in Kumkapı

“1000 USD is considered a high salary, but if they pay it in TL, it becomes unfavorable for us. A salary of 800 USD is also considered high as nowadays the Turkmen, Uzbeks and Georgians do the same job for lower prices, thereby decreasing the standard salary amount.” **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**



13. Monthly Income

Looking after a child or a disabled person is considered to be the highest paying job, for an estimation of 800-1000 USD, though there are women who get paid up to 2500 USD. Only those who have residence permits get high salaries.²² A lot depends on the relationships established between the landlord and the women.

“If you look after a child and the latter likes you, whatever you say, they will take it for granted: they do whatever I want for me not to go away because if I leave, it would be difficult for the child to get used to another person.” **58-year-old woman from Abovyan.**

Doing cleaning in houses, looking after an old man or working as a housemaid are considered to be cheap jobs with the payment around 600-800 USD.

3.3. Debts and the “itch” for Purchasing a Flat

Since it is financial issues that have brought everyone to Istanbul, and for solving those issues most people have sold their flats, the number one issue for this group is not only making their living in Istanbul, but also paying back their debts and purchasing a flat in Armenia. New families are also formed in Armenia, which also creates another new need for flats there.

“My son was about to be thrown in prison; I paid 2000 USD for him to be placed in a good region for his military service. The commander called him and asked him how much we had paid for him to go there, and when my son replied that we paid nothing, the commander swore at me, and because of this my son punched him in the chin. I had to cover the treatment of that commander’s teeth and it cost me 25,000 USD. My son fled from the unit where he was to take an oath, and I borrowed 25,000 USD, with charged interest, to bribe them into closing the trial.” **42-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“I never thought that I would come to Turkey, but I was in a very bad situation with lots of debts. My son has undertaken some businesses in Armenia but has failed; we have a debt of 25,000 USD—we have come here to be able to pay it back. Turkey gives an opportunity to everyone to work regardless.” **38-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“We had lots of debts and my father had poor health, but we all worked in our family and both paid the debts back and bought a flat. Now I want to legalize my documents for residency because there were instances when I needed to go to Armenia but if I went they would have deported me. For example, my husband has a permit, I don’t.” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“I’m not going to stay here for whole of my life; I just want to earn some money and buy a flat in Armenia. When I came, all my relatives—my brother-in-law and my mother-in-law’s whole family—had already returned as they had earned the amount of money they wanted. We also managed to pay back our debts—7-8000 thousand USD—over a period of four years. Probably I will still stay here for a couple of years. That is to say, I’ve come here to earn some extra money and then go back.” **37-year-old woman from Yerevan**

There is bewilderment among the Polis Armenians trying to understand why Istanbul is more preferable than Yerevan, considering the problems that they have to face.

“I haven’t yet understood what difference there is between the conditions of Armenia and here. They say there are no jobs, yes, here people can find jobs but they don’t live in good conditions. They may earn 500 USD and monthly spend 200 USD out of it on rent and communal

²² See Chapter 3

expenses. They transfer the remaining 300 USD to their families; why can't they earn those 300 USD in Armenia? And here are the conditions they live in: 3-4 people staying in a room, with a kitchen and a bathroom. If the policemen come across any of them, they can be deported, their children can't get an education, families are separated and so on; these people are suffering."²³

Nevertheless, many women have managed to pay back their debts and purchase a flat, though most don't know how to achieve this as their salaries are not so high; there is also the need to live.

"There are people who buy a flat after having worked here for two years; you get surprised-I don't know how they manage to both send some money to the family and to manage to buy a flat. It means they have some arrangements with someone for not paying rent, thus they save their money and send it to the family." **56-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"There were problems at home as my mother was retired and my father disabled. We couldn't even pay for gas and electricity. Thus I came here. I have decided to save money and buy a flat as in 2002 it was possible to find a flat at the top of the block costing 1200-1500 [USD] but when I managed to save that much money, flats already had a tenfold increase in prices. Then I met my future husband and we got married." **47-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"Here I both work and enjoy life. When I see something I like, I buy it and wear it instead of keep it-I live, I enjoy. There are people here that don't want to waste money for buying a bottle of water in the street to drink, or for buying a roll; they don't want to spend that money and save each coin. But I live a normal life-I buy whatever I want, I drink whatever I want." **53-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"Istanbul provides opportunities both to the poorest person and the richest one to meet their pleasures and enjoy life, according to their financial situation. We have nothing to lose, that's why we enjoy ourselves, but

most people don't because they transfer the money to their families." **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

Women achieve paying back debts or living at someone else's place by two means: either by gaining trust with the landlord and establishing close relations with him/her they ask for a large amount of money in cash, undertaking responsibility to work for them in the future, or they save every single coin, keeping their expenses to a minimum.

"I have been here for 10 years and I've managed to pay back my debts in a 5-year period Then I got 40,000 USD, went to Yerevan and bought a flat there. I could have left them easily as I had no agreement signed with them. But I ought to stay as they had supported me when I needed it most, so now I feel obliged to them. It's because they have been by your side at such difficult moments, and you should respect them." **45-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"This is how I paid my debts back-I bought neither clothes nor shoes. I asked for money beforehand. If the landlords like you, they will even take the shirts off their backs to give them to you." **42-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"How do they buy flats? Yesterday it was cold outside, and I saw someone who had a light coat on, she was wearing shoes and trembling, and she wanted to buy a second flat. Who can live like that? They don't even want to buy their favorite fruit to eat." **55-year-old woman from Artashat**

3.4 The Neglected Component: Human Rights Violations

The fact that there are no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey and closed border is an added factor that needs to be observed while studying the life of Armenian migrants since it leads to many problems that are not typical of other migrant groups working in Turkey. First of all, it refers to human rights violation cases when an Armenian citizen has no opportunity to apply to any state institution.

"In case something happens, the first institution they would apply to is not the police station but key people who know how to settle problems at the po-

²³ Sibil Çekmen [Polis Armenian Film Director screening a film on Armenian migrants] Interview. Istanbul. 8 February 2015

lice station or hospitals with the help of other key people. There are no official relations between Armenia and Turkey and when there is a violation of human rights, it can be settled only in solidarity.”²⁴

“Here we know how to settle everything and it’s better to do business with someone who you know. Personally I know about 20-30 families and whenever I have problems, I turn to them, and the latter, in their turn, have that many acquaintances, and this is how we settle our problems.”
50-year-old woman from Kalilino

Though one can witness cases of human rights violations often, women generally keep silent about this as they have gotten used to the conditions they live in and are ready to continue living like that until their strength betray them.

“Women work till the end of their lives and they either get seriously ill or by getting sick, they pass away. And then what will happen to them, no one knows, and there is no social security for them, there is nothing for them. They should either go back to Armenia and depend on their families or work here till the end of their lives because if you don’t work here, you can’t live-you have no rights here, you don’t even have an existence; you don’t exist.”²⁵

It is noteworthy that acquiring a legal residence permit and mastering the language are primary problems for migrants, and during the interviews they almost do not address the cases of human rights violations, though they are often subjected to labor exploitation-their passports are taken away, and this often happens to men working in factories, though women are also treated similarly.

“There are many people who take away passports and treat us badly, and you don’t want to work though the landlord says: ‘You will go only when I think it’s time for you to go.’” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“There are many cases when passports are confiscated, especially if people find jobs through offices, but when they meet you and know who you are, they give the passports back, placing their wealth and money in your trust. They ask you what needs to be done in the house, and it’s you that becomes the landlord. They come home like guests, sleeping over night and leaving in the morning.” **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**

“The first barrier is language but after learning it, you get adapted little by little.” **53-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“The workers at farms are cheated because they remain as a kaçak”²⁶
50-year-old woman from Kalinino

“There is discrimination and even if the Armenians from Armenia are beaten or there is a criminal case, they won’t speak out about it because if they go to the police station, they will be deported; their greatest problem is solidarity and supporting each other. Though some people have already found jobs here, there are landlords who confiscate passports and make them work like slaves in the farms that are small illegal factories where the Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Armenians work.”²⁷

It is impossible to call many farms “farms” because they are either small areas on the first or ground floors in the old blocks in Kumkapı or one to two rooms with few furnishings, are suffocating and very small, and sometimes they display a few items from their production that are for sale from the window facing the street.

“There are people who work for this or that person and are not paid. You can’t do anything about it-you can’t take him to court. And there are people who have been working for others for months and they don’t receive the money they earned; they can’t take them to court, thus they have to go to other people to work, i.e. there’s labor exploitation happening.”²⁸

²⁴ Aykut Öztürk [Turkish Cultural Anthropologist] Interview. Istanbul. 12 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58246/anthropologist-rejects-turk-remains-a-turk-adage-all-turks-arent-monsters.html>

²⁵ Lülüfer Körükmez [Turkish Researcher] Interview. Istanbul. 05 January 2015

²⁶ Kaçak means having no residence permit. See Subchapter 3.1

²⁷ Sayat Tekir [Member of the social movement “Nor Zartonq”] Interview. Istanbul. 27 February 2015

²⁸ Sibil Çekmen [Polis Armenian Film Director screening a film on Armenian migrants] Interview. Istanbul. 8 February 2015



CHAPTER IV

LEGAL STATUS AND VISA ISSUES

Acquiring a residence permit is a question of vital importance for all migrants but due to the closed border between Armenia and Turkey it has become more acute for the Armenian migrants.

The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations¹, which defines the procedure of providing diplomatic service by a third-party country, serves to protect and regulate the rights of citizens in the case that diplomatic relations don't exist between two countries. Accordingly, the case of the closed border between Armenia and Turkey should have also been regulated by a third country. There is also a citation on this in Armenian-Turkish unratified protocols:² *"... to establish diplomatic relations in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1961 to provide necessary support and protection of the citizens of the two countries."*

*"Let's assume somebody is at death's door; if h/she dies, what will happen? Now we have learnt how to deal with these kinds of situations, but there's no one around who will lend a helping hand. The issues of these Armenian migrants should be talked about and I feel sorry for them in the place of the Armenian authorities when they call me and tell me that they've lost their passports. I'm aware that America has no embassy in Iran, but there's somebody from Syria who helps Americans."*³

For a while it was the Russian Embassy that served as the third country which provided services for the citizens of Armenia in Is-

¹ http://www.un.am/res/UN%20Treaties/II_3_arm.pdf, Article 7, 8,17, 22, pp. 6-10

² http://www.mfa.am/u_files/20091013_protocol.pdf

³ Tigran Altun [Polis Armenian non formal decision maker, businessman] Interview. Istanbul. 13 February 2015



During the signing ceremony of Armenian-Turkish protocols in Zurich, © Photolur

stanbul. However, these services were terminated and only a few of the respondent migrants could only vaguely recall that there used to be such a service. In Istanbul and throughout Turkey there is only one authorized Armenian diplomat, appointed within the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization⁴ that was launched in 1992 and has been operating since then. Nevertheless the diplomat, authorized within this project, has no legal authority to deal with the rights of the citizens of Armenia and cannot undertake the role of a consul.

Additionally, the citizens of Armenia are cast to their fate, and as a rule, entering Turkey for the first time, they purchase a 30-day visa at Ataturk/Sabiha Gökçen Airport or at the Georgian border checkpoint, but problems begin to emerge after the visa expiration date. And since, as the proverb⁵ says, “If the mountain won’t come to Muhammad,

Muhammad must go to the mountain,” Armenian migrants have found out “all the ways to the mountain.”

4.1. On how the Armenian Migrants Go to the “Mountain”

There are some words in the migrants’ lexicon that can often be heard: “I am staying as a kaçak”; “I extend my visa”; “I stay here legally,” “I have paid back my ceza,”⁶ etc. “To stay as a kaçak” means to be an irregular migrant. When in Turkey since April 2014 the Law on Foreigners and International Protection has been put into force, which regulates foreigners’ living, labor rights and other relations related to this field, has enabled the Armenian migrants to legalize their residence status through their employees or some friends amongst Polis Armenians since they have to create bank accounts, have guarantor, etc., the picture on the right of residence has completely changed.

If according to the data of 2009, the number⁷ of the Armenian irregular migrants was considerably high—approximately 94%, in the case of the following research, only 20 out of the 40 respondents, i.e. 50%, are irregular migrants.

- Irregular¹ (50%)
- Regular:
- Extend visa² (7,5%)
- Work permit (7,5%)
- Turkish citizen (10 %)



¹ Irregular migrants in 2009 – 94%

² Extend visa means cross the border every month

14. Legal Status

migrants will find ways of solution.

⁶ Ceza- fine

⁷ Identifying the State of Armenian Immigrants in Turkey, Research, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2009, p. 12 http://epfarmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/epf_migration_report_feb_2010_final_march_5-1.pdf

⁴ <http://www.bsec-organization.org/member/Pages/member.aspx>

⁵ The earliest appearance of the phrase is from Chapter 12 of the Essays of Francis Bacon, published in 1625. Here it implies to Turkish state hinting that if Turkey does not develop migration policy,

there exists a tendency of not going back to Armenia, instead settling down in Turkey.⁸

The adoption of the law has its impact on the relations between migrants and landlords because the latter have to pay some fines for employing an irregular migrant, too.

“The number of people not having legal documents has decreased. Those in my circle, whom I know, most of them legalize their living statuses and it is obvious. Besides, it is women living at their landlords’ who have legal documents.” **48-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“Now the rules have changed. You should have permission to work, thus the landlords are also afraid because if they are caught, they will have to pay huge fines. I tell my landlord, if she is caught, I won’t tell them that I work at her place but the neighbor may give us away.” **42-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Besides, the law has inserted a new layer between landlord-migrant relations that is expressed by the attitude of the landlords towards the residence permit of their employees.

“Nowadays the landlords are afraid to be caught and most of them suggest that we legalize our living statuses. Now owners of farms, landlords tell us that they will pay our fines in case we go to Armenia, obtain a new passport and come back, and this means spending extra money. But there are people who don’t want to and tell their landlords to give that extra money to them ensuring them that they will settle everything on their own.” **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**

“Generally, it’s the landlord’s business to legalize living statuses, but not every landlord will do that, though the ones who will, they really do. Why should they pay that much money monthly? They would rather leave it to us. Those who get higher salaries, they legalize their living statuses.” **66-year-old woman from Gumri**

Nevertheless, the outcomes of this research show that the Armenian migrants try to get residence permission, and even some of them already

have work permits: 3 out of 20 regular migrants have it, holding long-term plans to stay in Turkey.

“I have a work permit because I’ve applied for citizenship, because I have done so much for this state so far-don’t I have anything to get from here? My lawyers have applied to Ankara to be able to open some archives related to my grandfather from Kars, and based on that to legalize my status, and it doesn’t matter how long it will take-in any case I won’t retire tomorrow, so I won’t go back to Armenia.” **55-year-old woman from Artashat**

During the adoption of the law, a survey was carried out on the number of people who hold a work permit, and it turned out that the Turkish government annually grants work permits to around 3500 people, which is too small a figure for Turkey.⁹

Nevertheless a considerable part of the Armenian migrants stay as kaçaks which means avoiding any run-ins with the police and living in the state of constant fear.

“Because of visa issues people live in fear, and when they see a policeman, they get afraid and many problems emerge from those fears. There are people who want to go to Armenia but they don’t want to be deported because they work here and don’t want to lose their jobs.” **57-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“That time, when I was caught, it was awful. Of course, they are people and they wouldn’t have eaten me, but I can’t describe the feeling I had then; half of my life faded away. They took 100 USD from me, and later told my brother about it.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

Though some migrants mention that it is impossible to give bribes to policemen, many of them also insist on it.

“Turkey is meant for giving bribes and it takes first place in terms of bribing.” **48-year-old man from Yerevan**

⁹ Bertan Tokuzlu [Professor at Bilgi University Human Rights Center] Interview. Istanbul. 18 December 2014
<http://hetq.am/arm/news/58966/anorinakan-migrantneri-kyanqy-turqiyayum-kdzhvarana.html/>

⁸ See Subchapter 3.4



Yabancı Şubesi in Kumkapı

“There are policemen that go around the districts, and by taking 20 or 50 TL, they neglect their existences, either for a month or a week. Because it is obvious—if the state makes a decision according to which no migrant should stay in the country, in 24 hours the police could round up 95% of these people and get them out of the country in a few hours. Therefore, this is a question of state policy.”¹⁰

It is noteworthy that the police¹¹ department, *Yabancı Şubesi*, is located in Kumkapı and the irregular migrants live right in the neighborhood of the prison. Nevertheless, nowadays the relations between the policemen and migrants non-formally have transferred to another level.

Hrant Dink’s assassination is a milestone for Armenian-Turkish relations in all respects, and after this event the police have begun tre-



Yabancı Şubesi in Kumkapı

ating the Armenian migrants better, though that change has occurred not due to people’s willingness, but at the discretion of the state.¹²

“No one harms them but I don’t think they do it for the sake of goodness but because Turkey needs a labor force, thus they need these people’s work; they are a cheap labor force. What else do they need these people for—to treat Armenians well?”¹³

“Previously it was impossible to speak Armenian in Kumkapı, and in case of being caught you could be either deported or they would take a bribe. Now they say that policemen don’t have such an order from the higher-ups. When they catch someone and learn that s/he is Armenian, they let them go. If you don’t do anything illegal, do your work and behave, nobody will

¹⁰ Bagrat Estukyan [Editor of the Armenian department of “*Agos*” newspaper published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014

¹¹ Since May of 2015, the power to issue residence permits and dealing with migrants has been shifted from Police to the Directorate of Migration Management

¹² Aykut Öztürk [Turkish Cultural Anthropologist] Interview. Istanbul. 12 January 2015 <http://hetq.am/eng/news/58246/anthropologist-rejects-turk-remains-a-turk-adage-all-turks-a-rent-monsters.html>

¹³ Sibil Çekmen [Polis Armenian Film Director screening a film on Armenian migrants] Interview. Istanbul. 8 February 2015

harm you. Now, good families have increased in numbers; they were few before.” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“Before, they would check your documents and in case something was wrong they would let you go after taking 50-100 USD or would take you to Yabancı Şuba to deport you. Now they don’t disturb you at all and some people say there is an internal order not to disturb Armenians.” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

Different countries have different policies for the deportation of irregular migrants. Turkey is guided particularly by the fact of how easily a person can be deported.

“Deportation in Turkey depends on the person’s nationality and the level of his/her level of dangerousness. The police stop a person in the street and check their passport, and when the deportation proceeds, they start to reconsider whether it’s worth deporting them or not. They think of Armenians as their enemies but also consider the fact of how dangerous they are for society. Some policemen have negative predispositions towards Armenians.

But deportations should be viewed from the perspective of how easily the given person can be deported, because if they could easily deport a person, they would do that. The empiric experience shows that Armenians are not as easy to deport as, say, the Uzbeks, because it means dealing with the whole context of Armenian-Turkish relations, which implies a social pressure on policemen that they are racist, as there are issues like the Armenian Genocide, collective memories and so on. Thus every instance of deportation is a specific case.”¹⁴

In Istanbul Armenians are deported in two cases: either the police deport them on specific occasions, or a person goes and gets his/herself deported because they need to return to Armenia urgently. When there is such a need, a person has three choices:

1. Pay fines and as they call it “clear the ceza”
2. Simply be deported
3. Cross the border without registration



In Aksaray bus station

The choice depends on what an irregular migrant has the opportunity to do and how efficient it is financially.

“Me, for example, I am not even thinking of legalizing my status, as it doesn’t bother me and I am not afraid of being deported, as I know all possible ways well.” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

If an irregular migrant chooses deportation, s/he can change his/her passport in Armenia, which costs 200 USD, or if possible, involves a fake marriage to a relative and then gets a passport change.

“My mother-in-law has been deported 10 times in her life. There are so many ways, such as getting a new passport, getting a surname change, having a fake marriage. Some say to my mother-in-law, “Aren’t you ashamed of being divorced so many times at your age?” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

Another way is crossing the border secretly, which means not passing passport control. This also happens in several ways, but

¹⁴ Lülüfer Körukmez [Turkish Researcher] Interview. Istanbul. 05 January 2015



The main cargo hub in Aksaray bus station

in all cases involves the active participation of the Turkish frontier guards.

Many migrants cross the Georgian border hiding in a truck with baggage or they pay a sum of money to avoid passport control. This way of border crossing costs somewhere between 500-1000 USD; the more times an irregular migrant has been deported, the higher the price is.

“Some take people in the back of their cars with 1000 USD. Before, they could leave by bus and return by plane, but now the system has changed, security has developed and they can catch you in many ways.” **48-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“Some people handle this by paying 1000 USD without any registration; they help you at the border so that you won’t get registered into the computer. You came and went the same way. Well, taking people in baggage compartments is the business of bus drivers. And I already have many acquaintances and I can arrange it cheaper; there’s a solution for every case.” **23-year-old woman from Hrazdan**

Though these methods were more applicable before, when the new Law on Residency Status hadn’t been accepted, irregular migrants still used these options.

Only 17 out of 20 interviewed regular migrants during this research have residence permits—*oturma izin*.¹⁵ The remaining three extend their visas, which means crossing the border every month and getting a 30-days tourist visa. There are people who have extended their visas for years, which imply additional expenses and double trouble both relating to time consumption and psychological issues, as the Georgian border is not close to Istanbul.

“I extended my visa for seven years, taking planes or whatever every month, and once I was deported; deportation or 2300 USD fine. My 3-year-old child was with me at the airport and I paid more than 1000 USD, and there I quite extending my visa.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**



In Aksaray bust station

Migrants state that they fly to, for example, Moscow, every month to extend a visa, and besides financial concerns, this seems strange at first sight. It turns out that if a state doesn’t regulate this sphere people will always find alternative ways to solve their problems, which makes their lives harder as they have to undergo many challenges.

As the number of migrants in Istanbul is increasing year after year, it results also in an increase of the demand of baggage transportation, as those people regularly send certain goods and products home. Therefore, several transportation companies emerged and you can run into them at every corner in the Kumkapı-Aksaray region. These companies provide transportation service for a certain price, around 2.5-5 USD for one kg, and they also use the service of airline companies to send the baggage of migrants. Therefore they send the baggage entrusted to them simply with a passenger who takes it as his own baggage. Or they might send it by air shipment. Each option has a certain price around 50-100 USD.

¹⁵ *Oturma izin*- literal translation meaning “permission to sit.”

“Employers for Cargo have a list of people who extend the visa, and they call them when needed, so they become a person who will carry a baggage of 30kg.” **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**

“It would be great if people had a chance to legalize. I’ve been crossing the border every now and then for five years; baggage here and there, everywhere around. Then you take somebody else’s baggage, and who knows what is inside it.” **34-year-old man from Vanadzor**

Extending a visa is a difficult and expensive process and being a regular migrant this way is very hard. That is why before the law regulation people preferred being irregular migrants to extending their visas.

“Extending visa for 4-5 persons in a family costs a lot. Only one member does it, in order to solve issues of going to and from Armenia.” **27-year-old woman from Gyumri**

4.2. The Shortest Way to the “Mountain”

Four out of 20 regular migrants are citizens of Turkey because they are married to a Turkish citizen. One of them clearly stated that her marriage was a fake one. Migrants note that years ago fake marriages were very popular and it was done in different ways, sometimes as “a favor.” Many Armenian women migrants easily became Turkish citizens, and some others say that they regret not having done so, because things have changed since then.

“An old man says lets marry, you’ll get my pension when I die, and otherwise it will get lost. Many do this favor. Their children themselves would make the arrangements for CRO (Civilian Registrar’s Offices). Ten years ago people were getting married and becoming citizens in a day or a week. Then, when we were suggested to get married, we were afraid, now we are older and it’s too late.” **30-year-old woman from Kalinino**

“Once we were even offered citizenship and my mother-in-law told me that somebody could help to get a kimlik,¹⁶ but I refused as I had no intention

to stay here. I don’t want Istanbul to be marked in my child’s passport. As soon as the situation gets a bit better in Armenia, I will take my child so that s/he can grow up with an Armenian spirit.” **30-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“Initially it was very easy, a couple would go for marriage approval, but later it became too wide-spread and the order became stricter; they will accept your request, will mark a temporary residence address but will pose additional barriers to getting the citizenship. Many regular migrants wait for five years to get it.”¹⁷

There are rumors among migrants that a fake marriage costs 5000 USD now, but it is hard to organize as they can come and check the address without prior warning. They might also invite the registered couple for an interview to understand whether they really act like spouses or not.

“They will ask the most stupid questions, like what your husband ate yesterday or what color his toothpaste is, or what you bought for his birthday; what you watched on TV in the evening, or what your last quarrel was about, where you went the last time you went out together. The list of the most ridiculous questions doesn’t finish with this. Well, because if you live with each other, then you should know everything about one another.” **29-year-old woman from Abovyan**

4.3. Number of Armenians in Istanbul and Outflow From Armenia

Turkey doesn’t provide any statistics about migrants, that’s why there is no official source to refer to on the number of Armenians in Istanbul. Though there are more urgent issues related to their lives being addressed, the number of migrants is important because the president of Turkey periodically makes announcements about it in the media with no reference to any source. Speaking about Armenian migrants on different occasions, the current president and former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan states that Armenian citizens

¹⁷ Bagrat Estukyan. [Editor of the Armenian department of “Agos” newspaper being published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014

¹⁶ Turkish ID

work in Turkey due to the “kind will” of the Turkish government but that they might be deported.

*“Those statements have two aims: they make use of Armenians as they want at once to make it seem as if they are so kind not to deport you and let you live here; on the other hand they threaten you with deportation. So they use it as a tool.”*¹⁸

*“The amount of people here can’t be more than 20,000, yet they make propaganda for Europe showing they are good people, that Armenia is poor and that they provide them with food.”*¹⁹

It’s worth mentioning that Turkish society is not aware of migrants’ issue and not only that of Armenians, but in general. The presence of migrants particularly in Istanbul is not really perceived.

*“In Turkey there is not a common understanding about why people want to live in Turkey, instead they themselves have a big desire to live abroad, for example, in Germany. This seems very natural to them, but when a German, a Syrian or a Korean is buying a house or a shop here no one really understands.”*²⁰

The previous research²¹ on Armenian migrants in 2009 thoroughly monitored the Turkish media where different numbers of migrants are circulated. According to the Turkish media the number of Armenian migrants in Istanbul is in the range of 40-100,000.

This year, on April 23, the eve of the Genocide Centennial, Erdoğan again addressed the issue of migrants in his speech: *“At present there are around 80,000 Armenians in our country. Half of them are citizens of Turkey, the other half run to Turkey from Armenia because of poverty.*

*But we don’t deport them back to their country. Currently they live in our country and are our guests.”*²²

It is interesting to discuss the number 80,000 a bit more thoroughly, as Erdoğan states that half of it forms the Polis community. Many sources though provide that Polis Armenian community²³ comprises about 50-70, 000, meaning that the number of Armenian migrants ranges somewhat between 10-20,000.

Those numbers might be clearly confronted by the statistical data from known sources in Armenia. If to consider that the choices of Armenian migrants falls on Turkey as a final destination in 0.4% of cases and so far 1,300,000 people have left Armenia, then the proportion²⁴ of Armenians in Turkey would make approximately 5200 people. We should also take into account that this number represents those who officially crossed the border and were registered in passport control, whereas there are people who cross the border secretly. Were we able to take into account these missing numbers, a truer estimate would probably approximate 10,000.

“I think that the main part came and I don’t expect a new wave. Well, there are concrete cases but not common ones.” **28-year-old man from Abovyan**

The migrants involved in transportation services or job recruitment offices²⁵ know more specific information about the decrease in the influx of Armenians. Though those people do not have statistics, they have their own conclusion due to their long-lasting work in the given sphere.

“The flow of Armenians decreases as while working with buses and transportation issues, we see that previously 50 people were coming, 20 were staying, but now they go from here and leave forever. Whoever saves some money, they leave.” **48-year-old man from Yerevan**

¹⁸ Nivart Taşçı [Polis Armenian researcher] Interview. Istanbul. 18 February 2015

¹⁹ Sayat Tekir [Member of the social movement “Nor Zartonq”] Interview. Istanbul. 27 February 2015

²⁰ Bagrat Estukyan [Editor of the Armenian department of “Agos” newspaper published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014

²¹ Identifying the State of Armenian Immigrants in Turkey, Research, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2009, pp. 92-102
http://epfarmeria.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/epf_migration_report_feb_2010_final_march_5_1.pdf

²² <http://civilnet.am/2015/04/24/erdogan-speech-canakkale-genocide-baseless/#.VT3zCiGqqk>

²³ <http://www.azad-hye.net/news/viewnews.asp?newsId=278aadh50>, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenians.in.Istanbul>

²⁴ International Migration Organization, National Statistic Service, 2013
http://www.un.am/up/library/Household%20survey_arm.pdf, p. 85

²⁵ See Subchapter 2.2

“It is getting less and less; there are not as many jobs as before, so many leave. There are still some people coming, but the flow is not the same. Previously six buses a week might come only for work, but now many leave, because it’s getting expensive here and they are not satisfied; the salary is the same. The flow of newcomers can’t be compared with that before 2008 and now. If one were to ask Armenians, they don’t see anything outside of Kumkapı—they go from work to home, but me, I am always with everybody and in the flow, so my view is wider and I have more information than those coming home from work and listening only to what a neighbor says.” **32-year-old man from Yerevan**

“It decreased when compared to what it was ten years ago. In the beginning 20 people were coming for a month, and then the number decreased year by year. I deal with buses, so I know.” **55-year-old woman from Artashat**

To understand the decrease in the flow of Armenians, one should observe the phenomenon from several perspectives. First of all in Turkey it is hard to get ahead in one’s career, especially for Armenians. And it was attractive particularly for middle-aged women who weren’t able to overcome economic problems and Turkey was the easiest solution to the problem, as it was cheap, easy and close, in addition to having a labor market for women.²⁶

We should also take into account the fact that the worst years for Armenia are already in the past and now people have an opportunity to choose. People also studied final destination countries and are aware of all opportunities in all directions, thus Turkey is not that promising.

“I have friends in Europe who obtained citizenship in five years and have already settled down, but I am here for more than ten years and have neither status nor have I saved money. In Russia these problems are solved more easily and quickly.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“Because in Russia they can earn something. Well, here they can also create something but they leave sick and exhausted. Here it is hard to get to

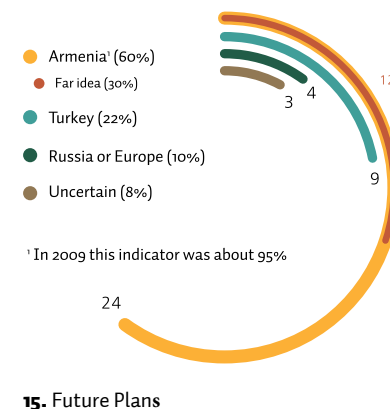
a certain position, even if one buys a house, they sell it later as so many problems emerge.” **57-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“My impression is that Armenian migrants understood that living legally in Turkey is quite hard and it is better to go somewhere else where these issues are more easily solved in a legal manner. Being a regular migrant is very hard in Turkey not only for Armenians. It is a common issue.”²⁷

Thus Istanbul is attractive mainly for people who previously have had experience in Turkey, have earned money, and can return to Armenia if need be. It is also attractive for family members and close relatives of the migrants already settled in Istanbul.

4.4 Home Sweet Home or Goodbye Armenia?

Only 24 out of the 40 respondent migrants or 60 % of them stated that they would go back to Armenia. This is a drastic change in the situation. According to a previous survey,²⁸ 144 out of the 150 respondents, i.e. around 95%, expressed a wish to go back to Armenia. Nevertheless, we should single out two groups. Out of



the 24 people mentioned above, only 12 of them firmly stated that they would go back to Armenia. The other 12 respondents, who also wanted to go back to Armenia, mentioned that returning to Armenia seemed a distant idea as they were not planning anything like that in the upcoming years.

“People come here with the thought that they will stay here for 4-5 years,

²⁶ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities] Interview. Istanbul.16 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>

²⁸ Identifying the State of Armenian Immigrants in Turkey, Research, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2009, p. 14
http://epfarmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/epf_migration_report_feb_2010_final_march_5_1.pdf

²⁶ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities] Interview. Istanbul.16 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>

earn this much money and return back. But going back is not that easy and there are things that you can't plan for beforehand, for example, high rents, illnesses and other problems, and people end up staying more than they planned. They will stay here either for 6-7-8 years if they need to send money to Armenia for the grandchild, and when the grandchild is at the age of going to school, they will still continue staying here."²⁹

"Nowadays my dad frequently goes to Armenia and comes back, but I came here with my husband, and then my brother joined us. At first we were thinking that soon we would go back to Armenia but that soon has prolonged into becoming 10 years already. When I had my second child, I put aside my traveler's mood because I realized that I have lived the greater part of my conscious life here, and no one knows how long my life will continue." **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

"No matter how long we stay here, in the end we'll go back to our land and water, but when will that happen? That's the question. You can go back only when there are jobs in your homeland, when you are able to buy bread for your child. By no means, one day we will go back. No matter if you live in Russia, Turkey or America, there are times that you want to go back to your homeland and your home." **34-year-old woman from Stepanavan**

"I haven't even thought of staying here-if I had a flat and a job, I wouldn't stay here another minute. If I have an equipped flat there, why should I stay here? My daughter has asthma-humid air is not good for her health. But even though you may have many expenses here, it's possible to live, unlike Armenia that lacks that opportunity. I think after all I will go back: we don't have "Turkey" written on our foreheads for our whole lives, do we?" **27-year-old woman from Gyumri**

We should also separate those people-4 or 10% of the respondents-for whom Turkey is a transit country. They have come here in order to leave for Europe or other countries, and the departure time is not important for them. In any case, they reassure that Turkey is not a final destination country for them.

"I have come here to then go to Europe; I have participated in the Nagorno Karabakh war and was injured in 1998. Because my leg is a bit amputated from the top, they don't implant prosthesis within the state medical assistance service. The knee I would like to have costs 6000 USD; I can go to Europe with 2000 USD, and I don't want to go there with legal documents because I don't want to come back. What should I do in Armenia with this leg if I go back there?" **34-year-old man from Vanadzor**

"I love Western Armenia a lot but I'm not going to live in Turkey. Life will find its way. I don't see myself in Armenia. Here I earn a good sum of money for working from morning till night, and you can't make both ends meet working morning till night in Armenia." **29-year-old woman from Abovyan**

It is interesting to address the motivation of the 9 migrants or 22%-of the respondents who clearly mentioned that they would not return to Armenia, and even some of them who stated firmly that they would return to Armenia, adding that they would come back by any/no means.

"We will leave but before that we will pay back our **cezas** in order not to be deported because we have gotten used to this place and our landlord has told us that whenever we come to Istanbul, we are welcome to their place. My husband will soon turn 45; we will buy a flat in Yerevan, my children will go to a university and we may not be able to cut off our ties from this place because I provide all the needs of my children due to this. What will we do if we all go to Armenia? But how many people in Armenia do I help to survive by staying here? I will go back by all means. Our problems will emerge when my children leave from school. If it was possible for my children to come here, I wouldn't want to go to Armenia any more, but my husband has no intention on staying here." **37-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"What should I do there if I go back? When I came, I was in an awful condition. I have bought two flats but sold one of them as there was a problem connected with my sons. I don't want to go, I don't want to hear the name "Armenia" neither." **58-year-old woman from Abovyan**

"If the condition in Armenia changes for the better, I would like to invest the money I have saved in Armenia-I will set up a farm in our village.

²⁹ Sibil Çekmen [Polis Armenian Film Director screening a film on Armenian migrants] Interview. Istanbul. 8 February 2015

I have bought some pieces of land and three houses. I don't know what will happen. If the condition in Armenia changes for the better, I don't want to stay here forever, but conversely, if it changes for the worse, I will have my children come here, too." **50-year-old woman from Kalinino**

It should be noted that the tendency of not going back to Armenia has a few reasons and family migration is one of them. As family members of migrants are gradually moving to Istanbul, and the migrants themselves work here, the economic condition of Armenia is not improving, consequently the migrants imagine themselves living in Istanbul.

"I came here and never regretted it. I have forgotten about Armenia since I came here and I haven't even missed it, and sometimes when we watch TV, we get disappointed. I am very thankful to both the Turks and Polis Armenians, and I have no intention of going back to Armenia. I had my child come here, and she got married here; why should I go back now and what should I do there? But even if not for that reason, I wouldn't go back anyways. What should I do there? I am 55. The Polis Armenians have told us to stay here as they would take care of us." **55-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"Now my children are here, and it even doesn't occur to me that I have a homeland; my sister has died and now I have no one there. I have no intention to settle down in Armenia because I like working-I don't like moochers and freeloaders." **53-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Besides, some of the migrants are elderly women who can't do anything in Armenia, while they can still work here.

"I can't go back any more because Armenia isn't changing for the better; I think that if my children had jobs in Armenia, I could spend the last years of my life there. As I am here, my sons can't even get my pension there." **66-year-old woman from Gyumri**

Re-integration is also an important factor. Having lived outside of Armenia for some years, people become detached from the Armenian reality, and to again begin their life there takes time and effort. Many people mention that people in Istanbul show more respect for each

other and so the culture of communication in Armenia is no longer acceptable for them.

"It is easier for Armenians from Armenia to go back after having lived here for a couple of years, but if they stay longer than that, it becomes harder for different reasons; they prefer to live on daily bread here as beginning a new life is a problem in Armenia. At some point I wanted to move to Armenia as I had missed my culture a lot, but I am not sure that I can stay there for a long time as the greatest shock for me in Armenia is the service. I am 48-what should I do in Armenia? But here I have some property and possessions-what would I do with them?" **48-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"If I come to Yerevan, I don't know the itinerary of buses; I know Istanbul, what would I do in Yerevan, if I go back? When I go to Yerevan I find people's way of talking strange: "Hey, pull this baggage, hey!," as if they are savages. One of them is pulling the baggage, while the other is shouting. I felt so alienated. I turn on the TV and can't watch the Armenian channels; I have already gotten used to the life here." **53-year-old woman from Yerevan**

"I used to feel bad when the elderly Polis Armenian men were saying that they wanted to die in Armenia. But that desire passed onto me; I would like my life and that of my children to be in Armenia but whenever I go to Armenia, I see the things that have brought me to Istanbul. I would like to be financially so well-off that whenever I go to my relatives' and see that they are in need, I could help them. When I go to a market and ask, "Is the plum sour?," the seller is so troubled; he says, "Ay tsavd tanem (an expression that is typical of Armenian conversational style, literally meaning "I'll take your pain away"), how can I know whether it's sour or not?" After Istanbul, that rudeness is evident. Though Turkey isn't a very polite country, anyways, when I go back everything sounds strange to me after Istanbul." **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**



CHAPTER V

LIFELONG LEARNING AS A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

Since 1980 “*Lifelong Learning*” or the “*Learning Throughout Life*” system has been put into practice in the West, and it is based on Theorist Paul Lengrand’s thesis on learning. It implies abolishment of the borders between traditional phases-education, work and post-work-in a person’s life, by suggesting the idea of learning throughout one’s whole life. The “*Lifelong Learning*” system is thoroughly stated in documents by the European Council.

Lifelong Learning (hereafter LL) still needs to be widely recognized as very few people know about the opportunities it provides. It is of more importance for the Post-Soviet countries where a stereotyped perception prevails that one should complete his learning process by 25 years old, and then by stepping into the next phase of life. LL can be formal, i.e. academic, and non-formal. Formally, non-formal learning methodology implies working towards the civil basic values and mentality change of the target group. Non-formally, by saying non-formal education people mean trainings, seminars, etc., but it can be stated that people obtain non-formal education through trainings and short-term seminars.

Nevertheless, within this research an attempt has been made to assess the educational needs of the Armenian migrants to understand where they can be addressed through LL, by achieving specific changes as new knowledge means a new opportunity, and thus-a new situation. This is important for the migrants because if one lives in a place, and further, if he lives there for more than 10 years, then he has some rights but is unaware of them. In this case the Armenian migrants are not considered as human beings, but as political tools.¹

¹ Erdem Vardar [Director of Yuva Association] Interview. Istanbul. 6 February 2014

“I, for example, have been living here for more than 10 years and I would like to know what rights and privileges I have. My children were born here; do I have any rights regarding the Armenian schools or not?”

45-year-old woman from Gyumri

The citizens of this same Turkey have had this very same experience when since the early 1960s Germany has been in need of a labor force, and a great number of Turks have migrated to Germany.

“Then no one had any idea about rights—they were thankful for what they were given, but later on they began to feel a need for some things and realized that if they talked about it, others would listen as they were also in need. Thus consultation centers were set up. The state managed those centers and assigned some people to help those in need in finding their way, solving their issues, as well as informing them that they also have some rights. The same can be applied to our case, too. We also can have an office, and people may apply to the latter bringing up their issues and the office will help them to find a way out, by stating that no matter how long they have been in the status of a refugee, as human beings, they also have some rights.”²

The problem is that after being a labor force exporter for a long time, now Turkey has begun to receive back the migrants it has lost in the last ten years by becoming a final destination country. And the fact that people come to Turkey to work is a new phenomenon that makes Turkey change.

“Nevertheless, no one cares, for example, where the children of the migrants should get an education or how their health issues should be solved. The whole problem is that a large group of Turkish society, including political figures and parties, are not well aware of these issues, and it is impossible to come across a reference on the issues of the migrants in the political discourse of Turkey, except on the Syrian refugees. Turkey should think over how to solve the education issue of the migrants’ children. Thus, changes should be undertaken in the educational system in order to find a solution for everybody, including Armenians. But everything has been left to the discretion of the society so far, leaving people to confront these issues themselves and find the solutions to them as they live here. Consequently they are able to

somehow solve their problems. If you don’t have access to educational institutions, then you set up your own schools³ like in the case of the Armenians. And no one knows how long it will continue like this.”⁴

5.1. Migration Resource Center: a Road to Information and Knowledge

In order to understand how migrants think about their rights as well as whether they would like to gain some new knowledge or skills that would help them to more easily face the problems emerging from their situations, a relevant question was adopted in the course of our in-depth interviews. But having left their country and families afar, the labor migrants have a primary concern, i.e. economic, and a secondary one, that of missing home. Hence, gaining some knowledge or acquiring some new skills is a far-fetched idea and they are skeptical about it.

It should be noted that except for being skeptical, women are very suspicious about any new initiatives. Based on previous research, according to which 96% of the migrants expressed a wish to return to Armenia, some offers were made to the Armenian women in Istanbul to learn some new skills which they could have applied and earned some money upon their return to Armenia, but they were not a success.

“I have a project idea that aims at helping women in Istanbul to learn some new skills, for example, making cakes, börek or baklava which all require little resources. Thus I wanted to find some partners among the migrants in Istanbul; on returning to Armenia, it would have served them as new knowledge and skills with the help of which they would have been competitive in the labor market. I have even met someone who wanted to set up a small shop selling börek, but having stayed with them for a few days, I realized that the women there said one thing but did another. Thus our cooperation failed.”⁵

³ See Subchapter 2.1.1

⁴ Fabio Salomoni [Italian sociologist, a faculty member at Koç University’s Social Sciences and Humanities] Interview. Istanbul. 16 January 2015
<http://hetq.am/eng/news/58672/italian-researcher-armenian-and-azerbaijani-migrants-in-turkey-both-want-to-make-money.html>

⁵ Karine Mkrtchyan [Founder of “Women’s Spaces” NGO] Skype-Interview. Yerevan-Istanbul, 28 January 2015

² Bagrat Estukyan [Editor of the Armenian department of “Agos” newspaper published in Istanbul] Interview. Istanbul. 23 December 2014

If with respect to short-term stays the migrants are specifically interested in finding highly-paid jobs and earning money, then with respect to long-term ones, they need some knowledge and information. In this respect, we received various answers in the course of our in-depth interviews.

“I would like to know more about the Internet so I can develop my business skills. I am the only one among my friends in Istanbul who doesn’t play games on the Internet, making use of it for the development of my business skills instead.” **48-year-old man from Yerevan**

“My grandchild was 13 and we wanted her to learn something but there wasn’t an opportunity and she has had to start working since she was 13 years old.” **58-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“I would like to learn about my rights here. My daughter was born here and I don’t know about any laws. Some people say she will be granted citizenship in 10 years, while others argue that there doesn’t exist any such thing; i.e. she is left hanging in midair; she doesn’t possess any birth certificate, except a sheet of paper having the name of the hospital and her name and surname written on it. I want to legalize it but I don’t know how.” **34-year-old woman from Nagorno Karabagh**

“I would like to learn about expenses in hospitals as we spend lots of money there. I have a residence permit but I have no idea what other rights it offers me, except for staying here. In order to take a blood test, they ask for lots of money—you have to pay that money no matter if you want it or not. But if I pay for insurance, it means I have some rights to something, don’t I? But we are told that it’s an obligatory payment.” **27-year-old woman from Gyumri**

“I would like to take some makeup courses, but most of all I like cooking—making dishes, a culinary job. When I first came here, I would have liked to first of all learn that skill. But if there were law courses, again I would like to learn what rights we have.” **34-year-old woman from Stepanavan**

Nevertheless, taking into consideration the migrants’ suspicious and skeptical attitudes, more long-term efforts need to be exerted to involve them in any new initiatives, because having been alone for a long time and relying only on themselves, they think twice

about a person’s motivations for wanting to help them—what is their interest?⁶

According to the migrants, a resource center can be a “place” where they can receive some consultation on what to do in particular situations. The research indicates that there is a clear-cut division between the migrants: a group of migrants that don’t want to return to Armenia at all, and another group that definitely intends to go back. Both of them represent target groups of the migration resource center, because as a result of family migration, women and girls who have left from schools miss the opportunity of gaining new skills that could help them find a better job in Istanbul than simply doing housecleaning or looking after a children, the sick, or the elderly. And the group that intends to return to Armenia, loses the primary professional skills with time, thus these people can learn some new skills in Istanbul that they can apply later on in Armenia.

“My children will leave from this Armenian school with no documentation, and in my opinion, after graduation they will continue living here for a long time. What’s going to happen to them?” **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“There are many people who don’t work and so can learn new things, for example, making baklava or simit, and it would be great for them to learn to do something here that they will make use of in Armenia.” **48-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“Often times people need an impulse from outside so that they can self-organize. It’s because often migrants come and think that it’s for one or two years, but they stay for years. And their life goes on without any sense; they can’t plan their futures as they don’t think it’s important, as they think they will go back.”

“We have girls in 8th grade who won’t go back as their parents are staying; I’d like them to specialize in something—eastern dessert cooking for example—so that they won’t clean houses like their mo-

⁶ Karine Mkrtychyan [Founder of “Women’s Spaces” NGO] Skype-Interview. Yerevan-Istanbul, 28 January 2015

⁷ Erdem Vardar [Director of Yuva Association] Interview. Istanbul. 6 February 2014

thers. And our children and mothers live and work mostly not according to their profession. I'd like to see more discussions organized which will give an idea and help people about what profession to choose." **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Besides, women have lost their real connection to Armenia after living many years here; they need to receive objective information. Although new technologies give an opportunity to follow the news today, their link with Armenia is through a group of relatives and friends who describe the situation in Armenia as black and white, not wanting them to come back, as migrants are the main source of their livelihoods."⁸

"I'd like very much to have something like that, I am for it, though I'd like there to be groups of people from Armenia or people who could come here so that we could learn what's really going on in Armenia; that could be a lecture or something similar." **48-year-old woman from Yerevan**

Many migrants also stated that when first entering Turkey, aside from the language barrier they faced problems like the simple inability to move in the city or go shopping.

"A Kirgiz and an Azeri girl helped me and my friend, and generally people from post-Soviet countries, who help by saying where to do cheap shopping, order water or make communal payments. The city is big; we need to know how to move in it." **35-year-old woman from Yerevan**

During this research I met a woman from Üsküdar who was going to Aksaray on her izin days using a very complicated itinerary taking a bus or a taxi, unaware of the Marmara metro line which has been operating for more than 2 years now, and would take her from Üsküdar to Aksaray in ten minutes. Many migrants expressed a wish to learn also about trafficking because Turkey is a primary final destination point for Armenia in terms of trafficking and prostitution.

"The idea of a resource center would be great, as there are many who are in bad conditions. Who can they turn to in the case of trafficking? Why there so many marriages and relations? It's because they

live with each other. In Armenia this is unacceptable, but one gets accustomed to the situation of this country and doesn't see them as aliens." **48-year-old woman from Yerevan**

5.2 An Island Within an Island: What should a Resource Center be Like?

A focus group session was organized with 8 interviewees in the canteen of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Getik Paşa to understand what a resource center should be like in accordance with the migrants' perceptions of one.

As a result of the focus group work several ideas were expressed:

1. The resource center should definitely be in Kumkapı
2. It should have a connection to the Directorate of Migration Management/local authority
3. It would be great if the initiative would come from Polis Armenians or at least involve Polis Armenians in it

"The resource center should have two functions, one on social relations, and the other on legal aspect. The legal aspect is more important, though; for example one loses the passport, what should he do? So, it should be a place where one can go and get appropriate information." **28-year-old man from Abovyan**

"I'd like the resource center to be organized by Western Armenians or with the support of the Patriarchate as its affiliate body, because they know everything from the inside." **30-year-old woman from 30, Vanadzor**

"We'd like this initiative to come from Polis Armenians and include Turks in it. Be it Turks or Armenians, everything should be legal." **45-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

In the migrants' opinions, the primary function of the resource center would be to provide legal consultations for different spheres; particularly in residence permit acquisition, because it takes lots of time and is nerve wracking, especially when you don't have information.

⁸ Karine Mkrtchyan [Founder of "Women's Spaces" NGO] Skype-Interview. Yerevan-Istanbul, 28 January 2015

“Here you go to the Yabancı Şuba and they tell you different things there. The laws are changing quickly and we can’t follow them. Here they tell you one thing; you get to customs and they tell you something else. We want someone who can say exactly what documents are needed; we are even ready to pay for it.” **53-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

“I am here for ten years, and I’m not afraid anyone, but I don’t want to live illegally. I want to lead a legal life and pay our fines. We only need legal assistance.” **47-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“I now want to send my daughter to the Yabancı Şubesi clear her ceza, but I don’t know with whom I can send her, because I am afraid that if I go myself they will catch me and deport me, because I’ve been here as a kaçak for ten years.” **46-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“If I had been registered now I’d have Sigorta from my workplace and it would have solved all my problems, but without that we have to pay for going to the hospital, and it’s already a huge amount of money. Whatever you do, there is the issue of the residence permit, as it provides discounts in medical service.” **38-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

There were also opinions that changed in legislation, and generally information in Turkey is kept secret to get more money from people.

“We learn about legislation changes through internal channels, even advocates here don’t explain the law, because if they explain it then they won’t earn money. Then, there is also bribery. Imagine there was amnesty and they kept it secret. Why? It’s done so that people go and continue to pay bribes.” **48-year-old man from Yerevan**

“It would be preferable to have legal consultation as I have two children here and I don’t know what rights I have. I’ve turned to 100 different places and have spoken to different lawyers and I am totally sure that Turkish lawyers don’t want to give me a full answer, for one. Second, I’ve turned also to Christian lawyers who say that they are not aware of the law. They are not aware because the law is kept secret. In any country when a child is born, s/he has certain rights, but not in this country; here they have no rights. This is because we don’t know their rights.” **30-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

Migrants are quite skeptical towards their opportunities to gain new knowledge; they have more immediate needs to solve.

“These trainings are issues of secondary importance. A priority issue is that there are no discounts at the Armenian hospital. And when you go to the Armenian hospital you are treated in such a way that you will never want to go there again. This is an island within island; these issues must be solved. You are here as a third-party person, like we are. And we, as third-parties, can’t solve problems together.” **53-year-old woman from Vanadzor**

Many migrants spoke about cultural needs as well.

“I am mostly busy with work and have no chance for self-realization. For example, in Armenia I could act in a film and develop, but here I don’t have that opportunity. I would like to have the conditions here that I can, as an individual, be involved in as well.” **30-year-old man from Vanadzor**

“I wish there was an educational center—it could be musical, so that I could continue my musical studies which I quit. I would like to also have dance groups. Well, there are such things but we can’t get involved, because when we want to enroll they say we are foreigners and don’t have the right. We wish we could have these opportunities to take part in educational-cultural life.” **32-year-old woman from Yerevan**

“We wish to have a theatre group for our children who have the talent to attend.” **46-year-old woman from Gyumri**

Generally, migrants are predisposed positively to the idea of opening a resource center.

“I like the idea of a resource center, and I would go there for consultation of my issues if the person sitting there was a normal person.” **22-year-old man from Yerevan**

“Whatever we have here for Armenians, it would be beneficial, because people lose lots of time and money because of a lack of information. In this center they would learn that those things are needed.” **34-year-old man from Vanadzor**

Conclusion

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Overall Picture of Armenian Migrants in Istanbul

According to research results the number of Armenian emigrants residing in Turkey numbers approximately 10,000. The figure is grounded by the assumption that approximately 1.3 million people have left Armenia since gaining its independence and due to the data provided by the National Service of Armenia, migration flow to Turkey is 0.4% and therefore 5200 people have migrated here. Considering the error ratio and the fact that many people pass the border without being registered, the author approximates the number of Armenian migrants in Turkey to be around 10,000.

This research material makes it possible to come to the following conclusion: the condition of Armenian labor workers residing in Istanbul has changed compared with the situation before 2010 and those changes are expressed by three indicators:

- a) Migration flow from Armenia is decreasing and on the contrary, a tendency of leaving Turkey is observed, conditioned by several reasons:
 - The absence of Turkish migration policy makes it very complicated to be a regular migrant and many migrants noted during their interviews that they are very far from engaging in the same position of the social ladder compared with their relatives/acquaintances in Europe or in Russia. They mention that the achievements (having a regular job and residence permit) people have gained in Europe in 5% years have been unreachable for them even after 10 years.
 - Being located in a nationalistic Muslim country, the local Armeni-

an community in Istanbul is unable to climb up the social ladder significantly, thus the environment is an insuperable hindrance for Armenian migrants who would like to develop their life experience and skills outside of Armenia. Turkey stands at 1.1% among the desirable countries for Armenian migrants while CIS countries show the result of 87.5%. However, as leaving for Europe or Russia demands a more long-term perspective and financial investments, while one might need only 60 USD to go to Turkey (combined with the demand of housework, housecleaning, care of patients/elderly/children, etc.) Armenian women who have urgent financial issues to settle usually visit Istanbul. The Armenian potential migration resource who consider coming to Turkey are people among the lower and middle classes who consider Turkey the shortest and quickest way of solving urgent financial issues.

- During the past 25 years of Armenian independence all the final destination countries have been studied and Armenian migrants are well aware of what can be expected from each place. Therefore, those who arrived in Turkey for short-term perspectives,¹ like repaying debts or earning money for purchasing a house, return to Armenia after achieving their goals. Representatives of cargo companies and owners of informal “*employment offices*” state that the current flow from Armenia bears no comparison with the one a few years ago. Instead, there’s an outflow from Istanbul to Armenia.
- b) The number of regular migrants has been increasing. According to research results 50% of interviewees are regular migrants; it’s a drastic shift compared to 2009 when only 4% of interviewees were regular ones. This change is conditioned by the adoption of the “Law on Foreigners and International Protection” in Turkey being in force since April 2014. Aside from various limitations, it also provides an opportunity to acquire residence permits, which was impossible before. Armenian migrants making use of their good relationships with their employers-Polis Armenians or Turkish citizens-succeed in obtaining a one-year residence permit.
- c) A tendency of residing in Turkey and not returning to Armenia has been registered. This is a result of family migration and is also a new

¹ In long-term perspective Armenians have never considered Turkey a final destination country.

phenomenon, as 95% of interviewees in a research study conducted in 2009 stated that they wanted to return to Armenia, while only 60% of this project's interviewees expressed a wish to return. At the same time 30% of those 60% stated that although Armenia is their vision, it's a very distant idea for them and they have no plans of returning to Armenia in the short-term. To understand this figure several factors should be considered:

- Family migration is taking place, and as part of the Istanbul migrant community returns, the other part after successfully residing and establishing contacts moves their family members to Istanbul. This tendency is directly involved with the increase of the number of regular migrants. If a family intends to acquire long-term residence in Istanbul, they surely look for an opportunity to become a regular migrant.
- The economic situation hasn't been improving in Armenia and the women who have remained there for several years, even when they have held different occupations, have lost their working skills and are not competitive on the Armenian labor market due to numerous years of simple physical work.
- After living in Turkey for a long time the returning migrants need to reintegrate and re-establish themselves in their homeland and as Turkey is not considered a country of primary significance for Armenian migration potential, in Armenia there are no programs which focus on reintegrating returning migrants from Turkey.
- The types of desired interpersonal relationships is also important for understanding the tendency to not return, as many migrants state that after living in Istanbul for a number of years they get used to the way in which people interact with each other in Istanbul, which they consider more respectful than in Armenia.

2. Educational Needs Assessment of Armenian Migrants in Turkey

As a result of the evaluation of migrants' educational needs it became evident that they have no short-term educational needs—their primary goal is to find a well-paid job and earn money. Instead, they need specific knowledge and information in the long run. The main need they expressed

is to learn about the rights they have, especially about residence permit. The need for training, especially for the Turkish language, was observed. Though the flow of the Armenian migrants has increased, there are always new people coming, so this need is always urgent. Internet literacy is also at the centre of migrants' attention and many of them who use the internet only for communication with family have expressed a wish to attend such a training so that they could use the knowledge gained for other purposes as well.

Many migrants also stated that when first entering Turkey, aside from the language barrier they faced problems like the simple inability to move in the city or go shopping.

In addition, many migrants have expressed a wish to learn new professions, such as cooking, hairdressing or Middle Eastern pastries. This is of particular interest for the young generation, as there are many migrants who have been living in Istanbul for years and their 16-17-year-old children don't study a profession and continue the work of their parents.

SUGGESTIONS

Though Turkey was a labor-exporting country for many decades, the economic rise registered during the last 20 years has contributed to a return of migrants and Turkey is becoming a final destination country. The migration influx means that migrants' labor is being used in the receiving country and therefore the latter should elaborate a policy regulating the migration sphere. But in the case of Turkey most of the Turkish society is unaware of migrants and Turkish political discourse lacks any references about migrants except those on Syrian refugees. Turkey should work hard on establishing more user-friendly conditions in the migration policy field because there's an influx of migrants and those people should gain an opportunity to realize their potentials not only as laborers but also in professional spheres.

Due to the absence of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia, there is no place within Turkey Armenian migrants can address their problems hence Turkish NGOs should pay more attention to the Armenian migrant community, especially in terms of Human Rights violation cases.

The following suggestions are made based on the present research:

To the Turkish Government

- To review the legislation on education and provide migrants' children with the opportunity to study in schools.
- To find a legal solution for the Hrant Dink School operating in Getik Paşa, preserving its autonomy and grant it a legal status.
- To support civil society in establishing a migration resource centre in Kumkapı, serving to the solution of migrants' needs and problems. The most important function of this resource centre at this point would be the provision of legal consultancy for getting a residency permit and other related

rights. It will promote de-isolation of migrants and will make the services of infrastructures in Istanbul available to them.

- At the same time, to create a legal consultancy body for migrants under the Directorate of Migration Management.

To the Governments of Armenia and Turkey

Guided by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which defines the procedures of providing diplomatic service by a third-party country, to provide service to the citizens of Armenia through an embassy of a country located in Istanbul which has diplomatic relations with Armenia.

To Turkish Civil Society

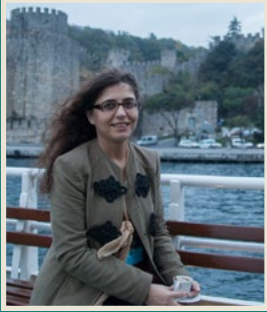
To create a migration resource center which will support the integration of migrants to the local context and provide legal consultancy. The primary function of the resource centre would be to provide legal consultancy for obtaining a residence permit, clearing fines and other related rights. But it can have other functions as well, particularly:

- Organize trainings on Turkish language and Internet Literacy.
- Serve a link between Armenian migrants and Armenia through Hrant Dink Foundation. Through many Armenians from Armenia visiting Turkey with the support of Hrant Dink Foundation, the Migration Resource Centre could also serve as a means of communication with Armenia.
- Organize various activities aimed at updating the migrants with the developments also in Armenia, as well as introducing the existing migrant programs that promote return and reintegration to Armenia.
- In general, a migration resource centre would aim at providing migrants with diverse information including how to pay electric bills or how to get from one point of the city to another in the most efficient way.

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YUVA takes measures for sustainable life styles, poverty reduction and democratization through adult learning and promotes participatory teaching methods. It focuses on least developed regions and disadvantaged groups for poverty reduction measures.

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“...And when you go to the Armenian hospital you are treated in such a way that you will never want to go there again. This is an island within an island; these issues must be solved.”

“It is like entering into an open door and seeing it shut behind you. Like someone closes your ears and you are in sort of a vacuum. You think you can open the door again and go back, and I used to think for years that I’ll go back, and my life will continue the way it used to be, because I felt twenty years old and because my life stopped at that point. But one morning I woke up and realized that five years had passed and that I seem to be living another life. Then my children were born and now I am thirty and it just hit me that the door closed in a kind of different way.”

“I bought an apartment in Armenia but never saw it or lived in it. I dream of going and sleeping in the apartment that I bought.”