



# STUDY ON MIGRATION RELATED CONSIDERATIONS OF DISPLACED SYRIAN POPULATION

## Assessment report

**Author of the Report:** Adrine Shirinyan

**Research Assistant:** Sargiss Rshdouni

Special thanks to colleagues from the UNHCR and IOM teams in Armenia, as well as, the State Migration Service, Ministry of Diaspora, Mission Armenia, the Armenian Red Cross Society, KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation, the SME-DNC, the Syrian-Armenian Businessmen Association in Armenia, and Caritas Armenia, for their genuine support and cooperation with the research team.

*December 2015*

*Yerevan, Republic of Armenia*

*The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of UNHCR and IOM. Assumptions made within the analysis are based on interviews with Persons of Concern to UNHCR and other sources of information.*



## CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1. RESEARCH SCOPE .....	4
1.1 Background information and objective of the study .....	4
1.2 Methodology.....	5
1.3 Quantitative survey.....	5
1.4 Qualitative survey .....	6
2. FINDINGS.....	8
2.1 <i>QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS</i> .....	8
2.1.1 Age profile.....	8
2.1.2 Length of living in Armenia and length of working (outside of Armenia) abroad .....	9
2.1.3 Employment outside of Armenia .....	10
2.1.4 Country of Destination.....	11
2.1.4.1 Volunteer return to Syria .....	12
2.1.4.2 Labour migration to Gulf States.....	12
2.1.4.3 Labour migration to Russia and CIS .....	14
2.1.4.4 Asylum seekers in European countries .....	15
2.1.4.5 Labour migration to other countries .....	16
2.1.5 Remittances and migrants savings.....	16
2.1.6 Difficulties in working and living abroad.....	17
2.1.7 Information need for migration purpose. Applying to MRCs. ....	18
2.2 <i>QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS</i> .....	19
2.2.1 Entrepreneurship .....	19
2.2.2 Job search and placement.....	22
2.2.3 General observations and concerns.....	24
3. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	25
3.1 Recommendations on quantitative survey.....	25
3.2 Recommendations to qualitative part of research.....	26
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	28
LIST OF LITERATURE .....	29
ANNEX 1: Questionnaire for quantitative survey .....	30



## INTRODUCTION

In Armenia, migration is related to the country's economic situation and the lack of well-paid jobs, hence people go abroad to look for additional income. As a most vulnerable part of the local society, the Syrian citizens who fled the conflict in Syria and got Armenian residency and repatriated to Armenia find themselves in particularly difficult conditions. On the one hand, they lost most of their investments and possessions in Syria, on the other hand, they face a lot of difficulties to adapt to the new culture and the rules and regulations acting in the Republic of Armenia (RoA).

Most of them, suffering from the lack of integration into the society, have to leave for other countries to earn money in more a familiar environment or in places where their services are more in demand.

This study is an attempt to examine the needs and vulnerabilities of Syrians displaced population in Armenia who has to work in other countries as well as to reveal the difficulties they face in the RoA, especially in job hunting and entrepreneurship.

The study consists of two parts: the quantitative survey and the qualitative survey. Both parts have their own findings and a set of recommendations provided at the end of the research.

The quantitative part of the study covers and describes all the main types of migration of the displaced Syrian population in Armenia, i.e., volunteer return to Syria, labour migration to the Gulf States, seasonal migration to Russia and the CIS, migration with the purpose of asylum seeking, etc. The information needs of the target group are assessed to make their migration safe and secure.

The qualitative part of the study describes the situation in employment and entrepreneurship among the persons displaced from Syria (PDS) who live in Armenia. Also, an attempt is made to find ways of keeping these people in Armenia and preventing them from migration later on.

The recommendations suggest mechanisms to secure safe migration of the PDS, and to improve the future stay of the latter in the RoA and their integration into the Armenian society.



## 1. RESEARCH SCOPE

### 1.1 Background information and objective of the study

According to data offered by RoA Ministry of Diaspora, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria until mid-2015, approximately 22,000 persons displaced due to the conflict have at some stage sought protection in Armenia, of whom some 16,000<sup>1</sup> are currently hosted in the country. Comparison with the same data for 2013 and 2014, respectively, shows that the inflow of persons displaced from Syria (PDS) to the RoA and their outflow to third countries or return back to Syria is still continuing.

The high rates of outflow are mainly due to attempts to find better living conditions than RoA Government can offer to the PDS, i.e. housing, health insurance, jobs, and allowances.

The survey of outflow also demonstrates a tendency of the PDS to migrate for labour purposes to different countries in order to earn money and get more financial stability and independence. Making pre-departure orientation services available to the target group is considered a good opportunity to address and prevent the challenges that the Syrian population might encounter due to migration, including exploitation, trafficking, rights' violation, and family separation. In this regard the Pre-departure orientation center (PDOC) might provide relevant counseling, advice and other information-related services to those who intend to leave Armenia for working purposes to minimize the chances of their rights' violation including human rights in general and labour rights in particular.

Thus UNHCR in close cooperation with IOM initiated a study on migration-related considerations of the Syrian population in Armenia and assess issues and opportunities when it comes to labour market and migration schemes for the PDS.

The main objective of the study is to reveal the information needs for the PDS prior to leaving for other countries for labour purposes and to ensure that the PDS in Armenia are mainstreamed into the labour migration schemes and benefit from pre-departure information provision to secure legal employment abroad. It has to ensure that the services of the Pre-departure Orientation Center (provision of tools, pre-departure orientation training, and counseling to potential migrants) are also tailored to the interests of the Syrian population in Armenia.

The assessment report is also intended to be a background document providing information on skills, family composition, etc., to ensure fair recruitment, safe migration and decent work for the PDS. At the same time, it will contribute to the prevention of human trafficking and other negative effects of migration.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Armenia. Key message at the Briefing for Members of the Diplomatic Community. Yerevan, 18 Nov.2015, page 1.



## 1.2 Methodology

Prior to the work, a desk review of available materials and web resources regarding activities, services and support provided to the PDS by different organizations and programs was conducted.

To address the above objectives, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data collection. In particular, through the application of standardized questionnaire developed by the IOM, information on schemes and preferred countries of labour migration, duration of migration, preferred source of information, and desire/possibility to be involved in PDOC was collected. The face-to-face interview method was selected for this approach.

The qualitative method of data collection was used to collect information on the role and scope of services of different projects and programs working with displaced Syrian population. The standardized user friendly questionnaire was elaborated and tested for meetings and interviews with international and state organizations and stakeholders, as well as UNHCR partner NGOs and companies.

To figure out and collect the data on the level of satisfaction and reasons for success and failure in job hunting and entrepreneurship among PDS, the focus group discussion technique was selected. Two focus group discussions with job seekers and two focus group discussions with start-up entrepreneurs ensuring equal opportunity for participation of men and women were conducted within the framework of this assessment.

Personal meetings with successful businessmen from the PDS, who established new businesses in Armenia, were also envisioned.

## 1.3 Quantitative survey

- **Target group:** PDS with LM experience, if any, or their family members, provided they have a breadwinner working abroad: Russia, Sweden, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, etc.
- **Sampling:** the survey sample was 60 PDS. These are the PDS with LM experience or members of their family, identified by random selection from the total number of about 600PDS families involved in the UNHCR assistance schemes in 2015.
- **Number of respondents:** 60 persons.
- **Interview venues:** The dormitory of the Armenian Catholic Church in Qanaqer district, “Mission Armenia” reception center and Avan affiliate, “Aleppo” NGO reception; individual apartments in Yerevan.



## 1.4 Qualitative survey

### Organizational visits

To identify the role and scope of the services provided by different projects and programs working with the PDS, 22 organizations, NGOs and companies were visited within the framework of the survey, as follows below:

*a. UNHCR NGO partners and other NGOs closely cooperating with UNHCR in the area of PDS integration and support:*

- Mission Armenia NGO
- Armenian Red Cross Society
- SME DNC of Armenia Fund
- KASA Swiss humanitarian foundation
- Save the Children
- “Aleppo” charitable NGO
- Center for Coordination of Syrian Armenians’ Issues, NGO
- Caritas Armenia

*b. State and international organizations working in the field of PDS support and integration as well as dealing with labour migration issues:*

- Ministry of Diaspora
- RoA State Migration Service Agency
- Targeted Initiative for Armenia Project
- GIZ
- Oxfam in Armenia
- Repat Armenia Foundation
- Syrian Armenian Businessmen Association in Armenia

*c. International and state organizations and companies involved with employment and advocating rights of employees:*

- Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (RUEA)
- ILO
- State Employment Agency
- Private employment agency “Tanger”,
- Private employment agency “Gortsbolorin”,
- Private employment agency “ASPA”
- Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA)



### Focus group discussions

- **Target group:** job seekers and start-up entrepreneurs from Syria involved in different assistance programs. All of them are participants of different training programs focused on skills upgrading, retraining, etc.
- **Sampling methods:** on the whole, four focus group discussions were conducted: two focus group discussions with job seekers and two focus group discussions with start-up entrepreneurs and self-employed persons. Participants were selected from those who visited the training courses provided to the PDS by the Armenian Red Cross Society, SME DNC of Armenia Fund, and KASA Swiss humanitarian foundation offices.
- **Number of participants:** about 15 persons in each focus group discussion.
- **Venue of focus group discussion:** Armenian Red Cross Society, SME DNC of Armenia Fund and KASA Swiss humanitarian foundation offices.
- **Duration:** Hour and half.

### Personal meetings

Personal meetings with the PDC who do successful business in the RoA were also conducted within the framework of the survey.

## 2. FINDINGS

### 2.1 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

To analyze labour migration trends and tendencies among the PDS, 60 face-to-face interviews were conducted. According to the sample, the largest concentration of the PDS is in Yerevan. 33.3% of the respondents were men (PDS) with different types of LM experience. The rest, or 66.7% of the respondents, were women, members of PDS families, i.e., wives, daughters, and mothers. They participated in the interviews because they had a family member working abroad at the time of survey.

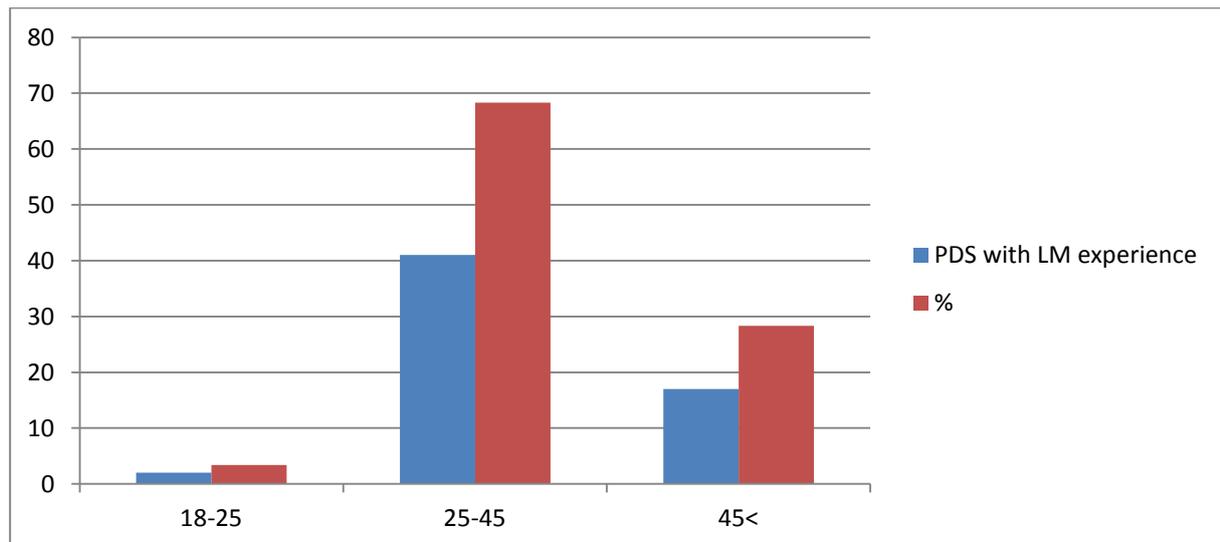
According to the survey data, 100% of the PDS working abroad are men.

In most cases they are travelling alone (91.7%); only 8.3% travel along with the family.

#### 2.1.1 Age profile

To assess the age structure of the respondents, the following distribution by age groups was done: 18-25, 25-45, and 45<.

Figure 1. Distribution of the PDS with LM experience by age group



According to age analysis, the 25-45 age group is the largest (68.3%), and the 18-25 age group is the smallest (3.4%). The former are mostly married people and have families to support, and the latter are predominantly adult sons supporting their parents.

### 2.1.2 Duration of living in Armenia and duration of working abroad

To assess the duration of living in Armenia and duration of working abroad among the PDS, the timeframe is divided as follows: up to 1 year, from 1-3 years and more than 3 years.

**Table 1. Duration of living in Armenia**

Period of living in Armenia	Up to 1 year	From 1-3 years	More than 3 years
Number of respondents	25	26	9
%	41.7	43.3	15.0

According to the data given in Table 1, most of the PDS families have lived in Armenia from 1 to 3 years (43.3%). The next big group of respondents is living in Armenia less than 1 year (41.7%) and only 15% of respondents are living in Armenia more than 3 years.

Distribution of the PDS working outside Armenia by duration of migration is given in the table below:

**Table 2. Duration of working outside Armenia among the PDS**

Period of working outside Armenia	Up to 1 year	From 1-3 years	More than 3 years
Number of respondents	41	18	1
%	68.3	30.0	1.7

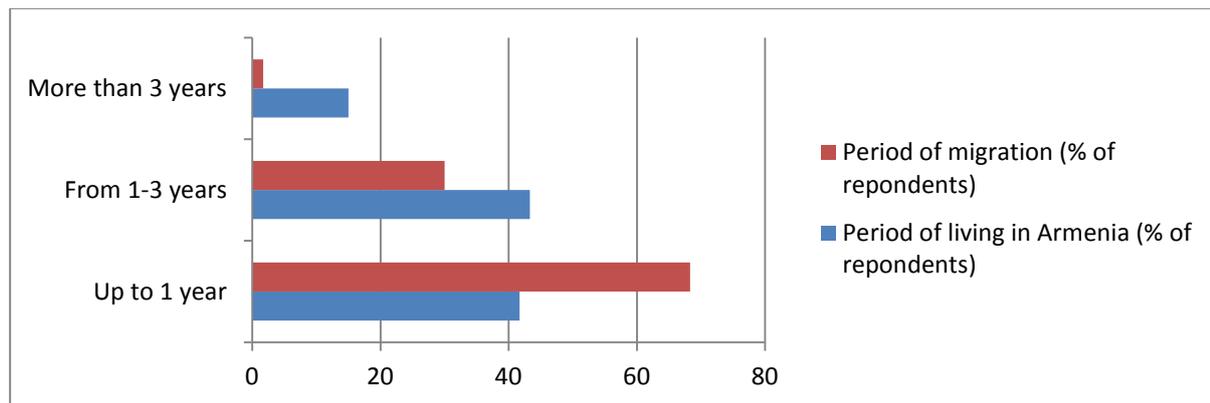
According to the data given in Table 2, most PDS are working outside Armenia for up to one year (68.3%) and only 1.7% of respondents mentioned a period longer than 3 years.

The main reasons mentioned by the respondents for the short period of working abroad are as follows:

- seasonal labour migration (3-4 months),
- short duration of working contract/verbal agreement (up to 1 year),

The comparative analysis of the duration of working abroad vs. duration of living in Armenia is given in the chart below:

Figure 2. Comparative chart of the duration of working abroad vs. duration of living in Armenia



During interviews it was understood that the PDS living in Armenia longer than 3 years are already integrated among locals. They usually have family connections in the RoA and are used to visiting Armenia before the Syrian conflict. Representatives of this group of respondents are mainly leaving for work to Russia and the CIS. This type of LM is usually not long-term and predominantly seasonal. Strong connections with locals allow the PDS to join the seasonal migrants' team and in case of request from the employer, to travel to the place of work along with them.

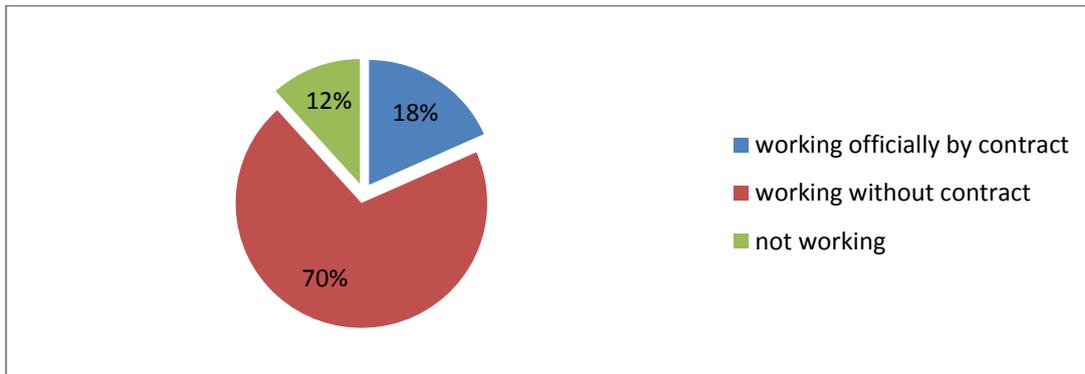
The families that have arrived in Armenia less than one year ago are divided into 3 categories:

- Incomplete families, as some family members in Syria are waiting for documents or permission to enter the RoA.
- Incomplete families, as they still have members working in Syria and want to keep their jobs.
- Families that came to settle in Armenia, but because of failure in job hunting and hard living conditions their breadwinners decided to leave their families in the RoA in more or less stable conditions, and leave for Syria to find jobs.

### 2.1.3 Employment outside Armenia

According to the survey results, 18.3% of the PDS working outside Armenia have official contracts, 70% of the respondents are working unofficially, without contracts, and 11.7% of the respondents mentioned that they are not working at this time.

Figure 3. Employment and types of arrangements obtained by the PDS working abroad (%).



The biggest group of respondents are the PDS, who are working abroad without contracts. These are medium-level personnel like carpenters, construction workers, hairdressers, cooks, bakers, auto service workers, etc.

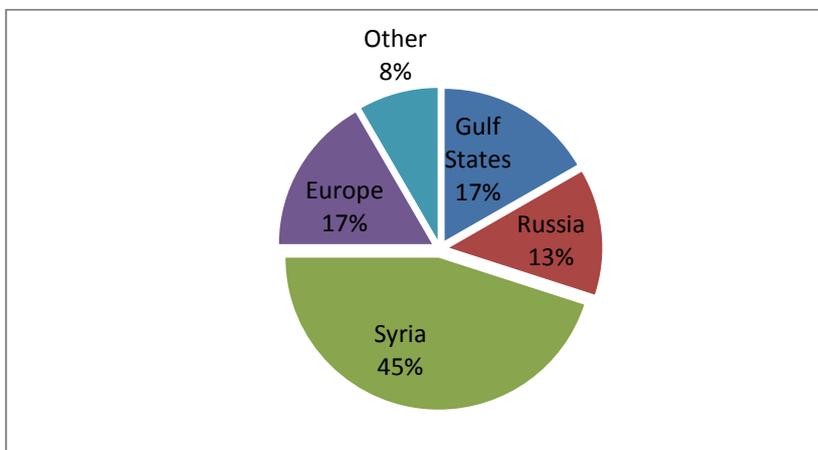
The PDS who are working officially by contract (18%) are usually highly qualified and experienced employees, predominantly medical workers and engineers as well as industrial workers.

People who belong to the group of “not working” (12%) have just left for employment to another country and are looking for suitable jobs. The people who applied for asylum in other countries, receive allowances and work temporarily also belong to this group.

### 2.1.4 Country of Destination

The breakdown of countries or regions where the PDS go to work is given in the chart below:

Figure 4. Breakdown of country or region where the PDS go to work





As we can see from the chart the biggest portion of respondents are volunteer returnees to Syria (45%). 17% of the respondents leave for the Gulf States, and the same percentage is true for European countries. 13% are leaving for Russia and the CIS for seasonal work, while 8% of the respondents mentioned other countries like Lebanon and Malaysia.

Brief analysis of migration to each of the mentioned countries or regions is given below.

#### *2.1.4.1 Volunteer return to Syria*

Volunteer return to Syria is very popular among the PDS (45% of the respondents).

**Period of living in Armenia.** About 52% of these PDS or their families have lived in Armenia for less than 1 year, and 40.7%, for the period of 1-3 years.

They usually come to Armenia, and get Armenian citizenship. If a job in Armenia is not found, they usually leave their family here and return back to Syria, to their well-known environment and try to find a job in this risky zone. The other option is that these people who receive Armenian citizenship being in Syria, send their families to the RoA, and being aware about the situation with jobs in Armenia, continue staying in Syria to look after their possessions and trying to find some job to survive and support their family in Armenia.

**Period of migration.** 85.2% of this group's responders are in migration for less than 1 year. The rest, or 14.8% are in migration for 1-3 years.

**Employment status.** 77.8% of volunteer returnees to Syria are working not officially; 14.4 % did not find jobs yet and only 7.1% have jobs with contracts. The latter are mainly people working in the medical sphere.

**Level of satisfaction.** While asking about satisfaction: 66.7% of these respondents are not happy with their job situation. Their salaries are much lower than they used to have before and the job is not stable. Along with that, about 78% of the respondents are suffering from living conditions. Absence of water supply, electricity and even housing are mentioned.

#### *2.1.4.2 Labour migration to the Gulf States*

Labour migration to the Gulf States is mainly based on the prior connections that the PDS had before and is more common for the PDS because all of them know the Arabic language, and are mainly aware of the business environment as well as traditions and the silent language of communication in these countries.

Before migration, the PDS are usually asking their friends and relatives, who are already living or working in this or that country about possible job prospects.

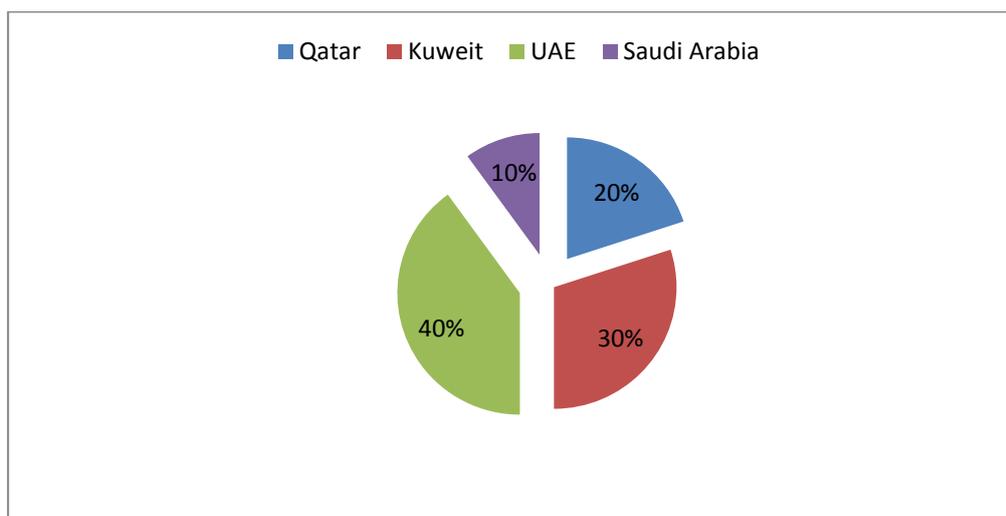
The PDS are mainly travelling to the Gulf States as Armenian citizens, because the majority of the Gulf States, i.e., Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, since the beginning of the war have disrupted diplomatic relations with Syria. Officially, Syrians can apply for a tourist visa or work permit in order to enter a Gulf state. But the process is costly, and there is a widespread perception that many Gulf States have restrictions in place that make it hard for Syrians to be granted a visa in practice. Most successful cases are the Syrians already in the Gulf States extending their stays, or those entering because they have family there.<sup>2</sup>

While migrating to work in the Gulf States, the PDS, as well as any labour migrants, are required to have some reference person who is responsible for him and guarantees his good behavior and work attitude. In reality, it is very risky for labour migrants, because in some cases the reference person can confiscate the migrant’s passport and the labour migrant might be exposed to exploitation and slavery. Even a signed contract cannot protect him in this situation.

Labour migration to the Gulf States might be very successful, if the labour migrant has high qualification/rich experience and good relatives/friends that can become his reference persons. In this case the PDS have big chances to find good jobs and work by contracts there.

According to survey results, 19% of the respondents mentioned that their family member is currently working in the Gulf States or was on labour migration in those countries. Distribution of labour migration among the PDS to the Gulf States by country is given in the chart below.

Figure 5. Distribution of labour migration among the PDS to the Gulf States by country



<sup>2</sup>Sources:<http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/uae-has-eased-residency-rules-for-syrians-1.1582025>, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15788>, <http://www.dubaifaqs.com/visa-dubai.php>, <http://dohanews.co/kuwait-stops-issuing-visas-to-people-in-countries-of/> and interviews with Lebanese Embassy official and PDS representatives.



All these labour migrants are travelling alone (10% of this respondent group).

**Period of living in Armenia.** The families of 50% of the respondents are living in Armenia for the period of 1-3 years, 30% are living in Armenia more than 3 years and only 20% have been in Armenia for less than 1 year.

**Period on migration.** 50% of this group of the PDS are on migration for 1-3- years, 40% of the PDS went to work in these countries for less than 1 year, and only 10% of the respondents are already working in these countries for more than 3 years.

**Employment status.** Most of these labour migrants (50%) are working officially by contract, (40%) of the respondents are working without contracts, and 10% of respondents are not working at the moment. They just arrived in the country, and are in the process of job search.

The respondents were involved in construction works, diesel pump production, jewelry design and textile production as well as keeping shops and sales. They just entered the countries and are looking for jobs.

**Level of satisfaction.** None of the labour migrants working officially (50% of the respondents' group) mentioned any problem faced in the country of migration. 40% of respondents have difficulties with living conditions. 20% of respondents in addition have also difficulties with job-related issues.

#### **2.1.4.3 Labour migration to Russia and the CIS**

Labour migration to Russia has a rather seasonal character.

The survey revealed that 13% of all the respondents are used to go for labour migration to Russia and other CIS countries for short periods of time.

62.5% of this group's respondents were males, returned migrants, and the rest (37.5%) are on migration.

**Period of living in Armenia.** 50% of this group of respondents have been living in Armenia more than 3 years, and the other 50% are living in Armenia for 1-3 years.

These groups of the PDS are familiar with Armenia very well. Some of them studied in Armenia in Soviet times, others have visited Armenia several times and have relatives or friends here who are able to support them. Having connections with locals allows them to join the teams that are leaving for Russia or the CIS for seasonal, low qualification jobs.



### ***Period in migration.***

- 75% of this group's of respondents were in Russia/CIS for less than 1 year.
- 25% of them were on labour migration for 1-3 years.

***Employment status.*** These employees are travelling alone, because of very expensive living conditions. They are working without contracts (100% of respondents) and living in closed communities, or "ghettos". The most popular works they were doing in Russia and CIS are as follows: car servicing, baking, carpentry, cooking and construction.

These PDS usually do not know the Russian language (or know a few words). They are not aware of the rules and regulations in the country and, hence, completely depend on their team leader and team members, i.e. relatives, partners and friends.

***Level of satisfaction.*** 75% of this group's respondents are subjected to cheating and low salary payment. In addition, 62.5% of this group's of respondents are not satisfied with the living conditions.

Among the things they would like to learn before the next labour migration season, they mentioned the Russian language.

#### ***2.1.4.4 Asylum seekers in European countries***

Leaving the RoA with Armenian passports, this group's representatives are going to Turkey or some other transit country and then, using their Syrian passports try to move to the European country which accepts refugees. Then they hide the Armenian citizenship and apply for a refugee status or asylum there. While waiting for travel documents, some of this group's responders are usually doing unofficial work there to support their families in Armenia. In general, the PDS families in the RoA which have an asylum seeker in a European country are waiting for permission or any other chance to join him<sup>3</sup>.

According to survey results, 17% of all the respondents are asylum seekers in European countries. Among the European countries, Sweden (90% of respondents) and Germany (10% of respondents) were mentioned.

90% of these respondents are travelling alone.

***Period of living in Armenia.*** 60% of this group's respondents arrived in Armenia less than a year ago, and the rest have been living in Armenia for 1 -3 years.

---

<sup>3</sup>Source: expert interviews with PDS representatives.



**Period on migration.** 50% of this group's respondents are on migration for the period less than 1 year. And the rest have been living abroad for 1-3 years.

**Employment status.** 70% of this group's respondents are working unofficially. 20% are not working and depend on their refugee allowances, and only 10% of this group's respondents are working by contract.

**Level of satisfaction.** 100% of respondents have job-related difficulties. In addition, 30% have difficulties related to their legal status.

#### **2.1.4.5 Labour migration to other countries**

Among other countries for labour migration, Lebanon and Malaysia were mentioned. 8% of respondents used to go to or are working in these countries. The same migration scheme as for migrating to the Gulf States is in place.

The PDS are migrating to these countries alone.

**Period of living in Armenia.** 60% of labour migrants' families have been living in Armenia for less than 1 year, and 40%, for 1-3 years.

**Period on migration.** 30% of this group's respondents are on migration for less than 1 year. And the rest are living abroad for 1-3 years.

**Employment status.** 60% of these migrants are working officially and 40% do not have working contracts. Among the most popular jobs in Malaysia they mention cooking and baking. In Lebanon the responders are mainly involved in shoe manufacture.

**Level of satisfaction.** 80% of respondents are not satisfied with job related issues, and in addition, 40% of respondents mentioned living conditions.

#### **2.1.5 Remittances and migrants savings**

The PDS, who are working abroad, support their families by sending remittances.

They mainly send them in two ways: on occasion, through other people, or through money transfer systems if any.

The PDS try to evade bank services because of international sanctions imposed on Syrians and restrictions on work in other countries. They usually use these ways of money transfer in order to hide their earnings and not to attract attention to their person.

### 2.1.6 Difficulties of working and living abroad.

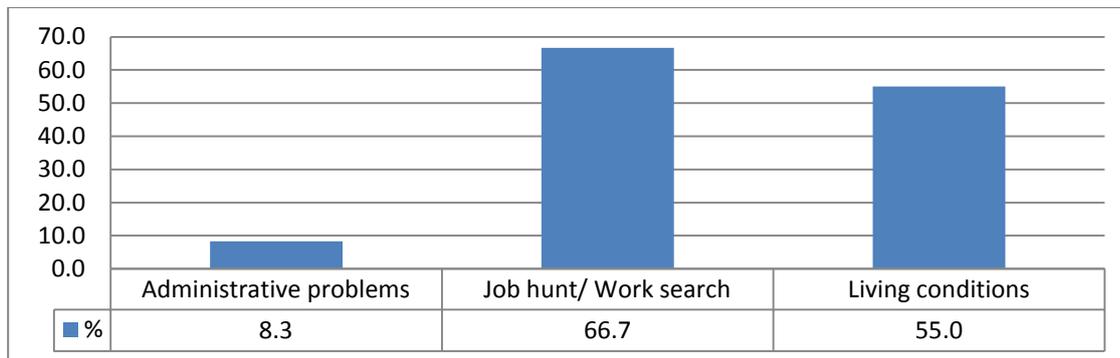
The survey also covered questions related to difficulties and gaps the PDS face while living and working abroad.

Interviews with the PDS having labour migration experience show that 16.7% of respondents did not have any difficulties while working abroad. The rest (84.3%) faced different problems.

On the whole, the problems the PDS face when living and working abroad are classified by the following categories: administrative problems (i.e. temporary registration, rules of migration), work search (i.e. contract signing, payment matters), and everyday-life difficulties (i.e. house rent, healthcare, education).

Distribution of responses on problems the PDS face abroad is given in the chart below:

Figure 6. Distribution of responses on difficulties PDS have faced abroad, while leaving for labour



According to survey results, 8.3% of respondents face administrative difficulties with registration and rules of migration. These are mainly respondents who left for European countries. Volunteer returnees to Syria mainly mentioned difficulties with job hunt (66.7%) In general, they are working on ad hoc basis. Besides, the group of the respondents who mentioned difficulties in living conditions (55%) are mainly volunteer returnees to Syria or seasonal labour migrants to Russia and the CIS.



### 2.1.7 Information needs for migration purposes. Applying to MRCs.

The PDS mostly prefer not to apply to various sources to find information about the country of migration or living conditions and job search. They rather prefer the informal way of learning about all these matters and apply to their relatives and friends (96.7% of respondents). 23% mentioned the Internet in addition to friends and relations as a possible way to look for a job in another country.

Considering the information that will be useful to know before leaving for work abroad, 75% of respondents are not interested in any information for repeated migration. The common answer is: “We know everything we need”. Only 25% of respondents mentioned that they are interested in information on migration policy and procedures in the destination country before departure.

None of the respondents are aware of the MRC offices functioning in the country.

63% are not interested in participating in any information/awareness-raising round-tables or receiving any consultation before leaving abroad, while 37% of respondents mentioned that they would like to be aware of medical insurance issues, social subsidies, migration rules and regulations, children’s education, country safety as well as language issues in the host country.



## 2.2 *QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS*

To estimate the level of satisfaction and reasons for success and failure in job hunting and entrepreneurship among the PDS who are Armenian residents within the framework of the current assessment, the following activities were conducted:

- Two focus group discussions with start-up entrepreneurs
- Two focus group discussions with job seekers
- Round table with women entrepreneurs
- Interviews with six successful entrepreneurs running businesses in Armenia
- Visiting a meeting of "Syrian Armenian businessmen association in Armenia"

According to the PDS who are Armenian residents, the reasons for failure in job hunting or entrepreneurial activities are the big differences between their perception, mentality and understanding of the way of running business and the Armenian reality. Thus in order to give recommendations on the integration process of the PDS in Armenia and to find solutions to their problems we asked respondents and focus group participants to compare the situation with start-up entrepreneurship and job hunting in the two countries, Syria and Armenia.

### 2.2.1 **Entrepreneurship**

The focus group discussions and personal visits to successful Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs try to reveal the following:

- main points in business/entrepreneurship start-up: what the PDS had experienced in Syria;
- demand and supply issues in the local market as well as finding the unique niche for the product/services;
- awareness about RoA legislation and tax policy. Favorable business environment between tax inspection and businessmen;
- problems faced in Armenia in the respective business;
- the role of a business body representing Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs/businessmen in different places. Favorable business relations between the Government and businesses.



*Main points in business/entrepreneurship start-up: what the PDS had experienced in Syria.*

While starting business or any entrepreneurial activity in Syria, people used to be tax exempted during the first three-five years of operation. Besides, Syrian Armenians did not have to worry much about competition and marketing issues, because the consumer market was big enough to find niches for all the goods and services they produced/supplied. Cheap and big diversification of raw materials and goods allows them to get products or services at competitive prices.

*Demand and supply issues in local markets as well as a unique niche for products/services*

Syrian mentality of working in big quantities and high quality products is not working here in Armenia because of the small size of the local market. In order to be sustainable entrepreneurs are searching for unique niches for their products/services as well as looking for flexible mechanisms to participate in international fairs/exhibitions in order to enlarge their sales and market their product overseas.

Otherwise, because of high level of risk and low level of market demand, in order to survive in Armenia they have to think about highly competitive products in small quantities.

*Awareness about tax policy issues*

Considering the soft tax policy for start-up businessmen in Syria, the majority of Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs are confused by the relationships with tax inspection and strict tax policy procedures as well as the absence of warning and notification systems.

Although SME DNC is conducting classes on tax regulations in the Republic of Armenia, the focus group discussions revealed that it is not enough for the majority of people trying to start small-scale business in Armenia. They are still not aware of the tax policy in Armenia and are looking for “clever accountants” who will consult them on the matter.

Absence of corresponding updates on tax policy changes or unawareness about the system of updates is also mentioned among the big problems by Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs in doing business.

*Availability/existence of a legal body that can represent the interests and protect the rights of Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs*

Though Syrian Armenians already registered the «Syrian Armenian Businessmen Association», its activities are not wide yet. The majority of focus group participants were not aware of this organization and its activities.



The Association is currently representing the rights of Syrian Armenian businessmen in the Government of Armenia regarding business loan repayment issues.

Such activities as consulting on business, representing the Syrian Armenian businessmen at international and local fairs and finding appropriate ways to participate therein are still out of the association's agenda.

#### *Problems faced in Armenia in the respective business*

- *Information search*

Absence of coherent information about service providers, imported products, raw material supply as well as local producers and their products is one of the serious obstacles for doing business in Armenia. If for local citizens the absence of information is compensated by established relationships with each other, the newcomers like Syrian Armenian entrepreneurs in most cases spend plenty of time on information search.

Absence or difficult access to information on market demand/supply as well as information on other markets also creates difficulties in entrepreneurial activities.

Concerns about this issue were mentioned several times during the focus group discussions and personal meetings with start-up Syrian businessmen.

- *Applying for business loan and micro crediting*

While applying for a business loan to local banks, the applicant shall provide a collateral in the amount of the loan or have a guarantor, who will guarantee one's solvency or otherwise will take responsibility to cover the loan himself.

Most of the PDS who would like to apply for business loans do not have any possessions in Armenia. On the other hand, they spoke about big difficulties in finding a guarantor who will secure the risk.

- *Opening a bank account<sup>4</sup>*

Considering the sanctions imposed on Syria since the beginning of the war, the residents of Syria do not have permission to open accounts in banks under international rules and regulations. Following these international standards, the majority of local banks, who are affiliates of international banks or have a big share of foreign investors are obliged to follow this rule and do not provide banking services to the residents of Syria.

---

<sup>4</sup>Source: interviews with an HSBC bank's official and PDS representatives.



The PDS have a right to open accounts in the local banks with a large share of foreign investment provided when:

- The PDS is living in Armenia for more than 1 year.
- The PDS has stable source of income in the RoA.

In their turn, the banks have the right not to accept the money if it was earned in Syria.

Among the banks that have restrictions to deal with the PDS are Ameria Bank, ACBA Bank, HSBC, Byblos Bank, and INECO Bank.

### 2.2.2 Job search and placement

The focus group discussions with Syrian Armenian job seekers try to reveal the following:

- the ways to find jobs in Armenia vs. Syria: similarities and differences in job hunting;
- the profile and competitive advantages of Syrian Armenian employees in Armenia;
- language issues;
- the attitude toward working women.

#### *Ways to find jobs in Syria vs. Armenia: similarities and differences in job hunting*

While involved in job seeking, the PDS usually follow the former patterns they used in Syria: visiting the employer directly and asking for a job, or asking each other in the neighborhood, or their friends and relatives about job opportunities.

The job search patterns here are not quite different and asking friends and relatives about possible jobs is also very popular. But living in a closed Syrian community, being not integrated into society yet and having a few friends in Armenia makes the process of job hunting quite unperceptive.

To assist the PDS in job placement, a special program was developed by SEA to bring them to state and private employment agencies.

Most of the PDS, especially newcomers, do not know much about state/private employment agencies functioning in Armenia. Some of them who applied to the SEA or PEA expressed serious concern about their work style and quality of provided services.

The PDS are usually not satisfied with the lengthy job search process, low salaries of the suggested jobs, hard working conditions and absence of contracts in most cases. Considering



that people have to pay for rent and utilities, the maximum suggested salary of 120,000 AMD is not enough.

There is a group of people who decided to solve the problem by becoming self-employed. Some of them entered an Armenian Red Cross program of providing necessary tools and rent a space to provide services on their own, others apply for financial credits to do the same.

This way of earning money is the most efficient, if the person is a professional in his job. Besides, people can register their business as a family business and pay the taxes by a more favorable scheme.

Some advantages of doing this kind of jobs in Armenia:

- The job seekers, especially in beauty salons, and craft shops can rent a room or even a chair and work on their own. The PDS mentioned this possibility among one of the biggest advantages of working in the local market vs. Syrian.
- Absence of intercultural and interreligious conflicts in the local market is the next biggest advantage mentioned by local job seekers.

#### *Profile and competitive advantages of Syrian Armenian employees in Armenia*

Visit to several SEA and PEA offices and discussion of different programs allowing the PDS to find jobs in the local market as well as some references given by the employers who have already started working with the PDS create some opinion about the profile of Syrian Armenian employees as very accurate, honest and skillful.

They are rather professional craftsmen: jewelers, cooks, carpenters, hairdressers, tailors, auto-service workers.

These are the specialties the SEA and PEA applicants are looking for.

People with higher qualification seek jobs in the Internet. They are also creating a network of good connections through involving in different projects and internship programs as well as becoming members of different international and local organizations.

#### *Attitude toward working women*

Most of Syrian Armenian women did not work while living in Syria. They were housekeepers whose main responsibility was upbringing children. If they wanted they could be involved in some part-time work as teachers in national schools, or sewing and knitting different handicraft items for sale.



Women with higher qualification, i.e., agronomists, doctors, economists, etc., had received job placement suggestions upon graduation of the university. Duration of their working day is from 5 to 6 hours.

People of the first category find themselves in a very difficult situation because they cannot continue as they used to before and have to change their qualification or learn some entrepreneurial skills to start their business or find their niches in the local market.

On the whole, different observations and discussions with the PDS and SEA and PEA agencies as well as organizations working on PDS integration in local society reveal that the PDS have difficulties in changing their professional background in order to meet market demands.

### *Language issues*

Language difference is one of the most vital topics the PDS are facing today in job hunting. State organizations and agencies require good knowledge of the Eastern Armenian language that is the official working language in the RoA. On the other hand, all service providing companies require fair knowledge of colloquial Russian, which has been very popular in Armenia for years, to speak with clients if necessary.

This makes the PDS take language classes in order to be competitive in job hunting in local market.

On the other hand, the desire to keep one's self-identity does not allow them to lose the specific Western Armenian language they are speaking in.

### **2.2.3 General observations and concerns**

Some general observations and concerns expressed by the PDS regarding their involvement in different assistance programs and projects supporting their integration into local society.

- The coordination and information dissemination mechanism from NGOs and State agencies to the PDS is rather weak. The majority of the PDS, especially newcomers and people living in isolated Syrian neighborhoods are not aware of different integration programs and projects intended to improve their wellbeing. Though interconnection between the PDS is very high, sometimes it is not enough to make them aware of all the support activities in place for them in Armenia. On the other hand, NGOs working with the PDS do not have strong information dissemination mechanisms and deliver news by phone and on ad hoc basis.



- The PDS also mention about overall incoherence of providing assistance and support as well as about a slow system of document (passport, refugee status) provision. It might take several months. For example, some classes and training prior to job hunting might have duration of three-four months. So, upon receiving the documents and completing the training course they are already out of rent support program for 6 months maximum.
- The house rent issue is still one of the most painful and vital points for the PDS living in Armenia. Being forced to spend on average about USD200 -250USD for rent make the efforts to improve their wellbeing in Armenia ineffective.

***Some ideas were voiced for giving low interest-rate or interest-free mortgage loans to enable the PDS to have some prospects to get their own houses in the future by paying a monthly fee.***

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 3.1 Recommendations on the quantitative survey

- Considering language preferences of the PDS, it will be useful to develop ***MRC bilingual introductory brochure or leaflet*** in Arabic and Western Armenian and to distribute it among the PDS, especially newcomers.
- Develop and present/distribute a ***brochure of success stories about people with similar personal histories, who are visiting the Gulf States for labour issues.*** Again, it is preferable to have material in both languages: Arabic and Western Armenian.
- Invite different active PDS to participate in the thematic meetings at the MRC along with other returned labour migrants as well as in different presentations of MRC activities. Considering the high level of inter-communication among the PDS and trust in this source of information, it might be one of the ways to distribute information about MRC activities.



- Develop and present a **brochure with addresses of offices and official bodies located in the Gulf States**, where the PDS and locals can apply while having problems during labor migration in these countries.

### 3.2 Recommendations to the qualitative part of research.

#### *Necessity to join the association*

The majority of participants in the start-up business/entrepreneurship focus group expressed a desire to have an organization that will advocate their rights, and deliver their needs and concerns to the government of the RoA. They also look for a suitable place to discuss their problems and find solutions and support in issues of concern.

They were surprised to learn about the «Syrian Armenians’ Businessmen Association in Armenia» functioning in Armenia that tries to find solutions to the problems of Syrian Armenian businessmen. There is a real need to widen the association’s services or to open a new organization that will allow start-up businessmen to share their experience with each other as well as provide consultation on vital issues.

#### *Opening a marketplace for Syrian Armenians*

A round table with Syrian Armenian women as well as different meetings revealed that they used to do knitting and sewing as well as unique embroidery while living in Syria, and are very skillful at that.

The majority of them got involved with the Armenian Red Cross Society project and got the sewing/knitting tools to continue their work here and earn money. One of the biggest obstacles in their way to become self-sustainable is the absence of finances to market their products and to deliver it to end users. Numerous fairs organized by UNHCR and other organizations are not able to ensure sales of their products on continuous basis.

The idea was voiced “to open a marketplace for Syrian Armenians where they can present and sell their products”.



### *Develop new banking rules for the PDS to get credits and micro loans*

Considering the restrictions imposed on Syrian residents in the banking sphere as well as taking into account the difficulties for the PDS related to crediting and micro-loan rules in Armenia, i.e., absence of possessions and guarantors, it is suggested to develop some specific set of regulations that will allow to overcome these difficulties.

### *Accounting classes for Syrian Armenians*

While discussing desirable trainings during focus groups with job seekers and start-up businessmen/entrepreneurs, an idea was voiced to open classes or requalification accounting courses for Syrian Armenians.

Considering the fact that people prefer to work with the ones from their community, this might be helpful for both job seekers and businessmen/entrepreneurs.

### *The Western Armenian language.*

In order to have the Syrian Armenian community as a full-fledged member of the local society it is suggested to open optional classes in Western Armenian, which will allow:

- to increase the knowledge of Western Armenian among locals.
- to maintain the self-identity of Syrian Armenians
- displaced Syrian Armenian women language teachers, to run Western Armenian classes in schools, to be employed.



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CTUA	Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
LM	Labour migrant
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PDOC	Pre Departure orientation Center
PDS	Person Displaced by Conflict
PEA	Private Employment Agency
RoA	Republic of Armenia
RUEA	Republican Union of Employers of Armenia
SEA	State Employment Agency
SME DNC	Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center -Fund
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees



## LIST OF LITERATURE

1. Problem analysis and measures to improve and support the economic integration of Syrian refugees in Armenia. GIZ, 2015
2. Participatory assessment, consolidated findings and recommendations. UNHCR, 2015
3. UNHCR Armenia. Key messages at the Briefing for Members of the Diplomatic Community. Yerevan, 18 Nov. 2015
4. UNHCR briefing note N3 on situation of Persons Displaced by the Conflict in Syria seeking protection in Armenia. UNHCR, 2015
5. UNHCR projects 2015 overview
6. UNHCR briefing note N2 on situation of Persons Displaced by the Conflict in Syria seeking protection in Armenia. UNHCR, 2014
7. Handbook of frequently asked legal questions for persons displaced from Syria to Armenia. UNHCR, 2014
8. Women displaced from Syria seeking safe haven in Armenia. ICHD, 2013
9. Referral guide for reintegration of returnees in Armenia. IOM, 2013



## ANNEX 1: Questionnaire for quantitative survey

# Questionnaire

**1. Sex**

Male

Female

**2. Age**

18-25

25-45

45 and over

**3. Where have you come from?** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Were you abroad alone/with family?** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. How long did you live abroad?**

Under 1 year

from 1 to 3 years

3 and more years

**6. Did you work in the country you stayed in?**

Yes, officially, by contract

Yes, unofficially

No

**7. The main problems you faced in the country during your stay were related to:**

Administrative problems

(registration, migration rules)

Job hunt/work

(contract, remuneration)

Living conditions

(house rent, everyday life, access to medical services, school)

No problems



**8. What information would have been most useful during your stay abroad?**

- Information on migration rules
- Information on state institutions
- Information on NGOs and culture institutions
- Information on the country where I stay (customs, culture)

**9. Have you heard about migration resource centers within the State Employment Service functioning in your region?**

Yes  No  Move, please, to question No. 12

**10. Have you ever applied to a migration resource center to obtain information?**

Yes  Move, please, to question No. 12 No

**11. Mark the main obstacle that prevented you from applying(select only one answer)**

- I only heard, but I don't know where and how to get in touch
- I didn't need information
- It is far from the place of our residence and we have no way of visiting it
- Our friends and relations had already applied, and we were told that the information wouldn't help us
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**12. If meetings are organized for pre-departure preparation to obtain information before you go abroad, will you participate in them?**

- Yes
- No, we have already got needed information
- Thank you (interview over)

**13. If you go abroad again, what information sources will you use?**

Friends and relations  Official sources  Internet

**14. What information would be most useful? (please, describe briefly)**

---



---



---



---



---



---