
ARMENIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION: SHORT- AND LONGER-TERM TRENDS

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Armenia has long considered its negative demographic trends a threat. The issue was mentioned in both versions of the country's National Security Strategy – the first one adopted in 2007 and the second in 2020 (see EDM, July 27). Before that, observed demographic declines already influenced some state policies, particularly in the security space. Notably, in the mid-1990s, conscripts generally had to serve in the Armed Forces for 18 months, while those who deferred in order to receive university degrees still had to serve for 12 months; by 1998, however, those terms already had to be increased, to 24 and 18 months, respectively, because of a decreasing pool of potential draftees. And shortly thereafter, the military moved to a universal and mandatory 24-month term. In late 2017, then-president Serzh Sargsyan signed into law the requirement that any male university student seeking a draft deferment must sign a contract to later serve in the military for three years. The law was met with student protests (The Armenian Weekly, November 15, 2017).

Recent analysis shows that, since gaining independence in September 1991, the Armenian population grew to its largest size in 1992 – 3.63 million, compared to 3.57 million the year before. A rather sharp decline occurred between 1993 and 1995, when the number of Armenian residents fell to 3.26 million. Since then, the population decline has steadily continued, reaching to 2.962 million in 2019 and 2.957 million in 2020. It should be noted, however, that the registered population includes those who live abroad for most of a given year. So, the large numbers of labor migrants working in Russia, who mostly return to Armenia for a few weeks in winter, are still included in statistics measuring the registered population. According to some estimates, as many as 1.12 million Armenians – 31 percent of the population – have emigrated between 1991 and 2019, even though many are still officially registered in Armenia (Hetq.am, February 17, 2020).

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