

## HOMELAND, BELONGING, AND RETURN: PUSH-PULL FACTORS OF ARMENIAN REPATRIATION DURING THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

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### Abstract

This article examines both push and pull factors influencing the repatriation of Armenians in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and subsequent full-scale war. Based on secondary analysis of statistical data, sociological research, and qualitative materials, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study identifies key political, social, and economic push factors driving emigration from Russia and Ukraine, including fear of ongoing war, uncertainty, instability, and deteriorating economic conditions. The article also explores key pull factors attracting Armenians to their homeland, including the desire for a safer environment, cultural and social ties, a sense of belonging, a more comfortable lifestyle, and a desire to contribute to the development of their country. Potential factors pushing for repatriation within Armenia are also highlighted, including an underdeveloped repatriation system, persistent security concerns, economic difficulties, limited infrastructure, limited opportunities for professional advancement, and low wages. Taken together, these findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex motivations driving Armenian repatriation in a context of regional instability.

**Keywords:** *Armenian repatriation, Russia-Ukraine war, migration, push-pull factors, integration policy, repatriation system, Armenian diaspora, post-conflict development.*

### Introduction

This article attempts to assess the pull-push factors of the repatriation of Armenians from Russia and Ukraine caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. Taking into account the lack of human resources and underpopulation of Armenia, this repatriation emphasizes

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the need for urgent adoption of effective migration regulation and social integration strategies and necessitates proactive measures from policymakers and community leaders to navigate the complexities and opportunities associated with repatriation. The call for swift integration policies stems from a complex interplay of factors, including security concerns, humanitarian considerations, economic implications, and the vital need for social cohesion. In exploring the motivations and dynamics behind Armenians returning home, it is imperative to contextualize within Armenia's broader landscape of push and pull factors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been a subject of social study for decades. As the movement of individuals across borders continues to shape global societies, understanding the theoretical foundations behind migration is crucial. Researchers have long sought to explain why people migrate, the factors driving this movement, and the consequences of such transitions. This section presents the key theories and concepts that underpin the study of migration, focusing on its causes, patterns, and impacts, both on individuals and society.

Migration refers to the movement of populations or individuals associated with changing their permanent or temporary place of residence. It includes groups of people who leave their place of residence (*emigration*) and those who arrive at a new place (*immigration*) (IOM 2024).

The concept of migration refers to the movement of individuals, families, or groups, typically involving a permanent or semi-permanent change in residence. Throughout human history, migration has been a constant, influenced by various factors such as economic opportunities, improved living conditions, educational access, demographic shifts, family reunification, environmental disasters, wars, and even political persecution. These different drivers highlight the complexity of migration, with people moving for both voluntary and involuntary reasons, across domestic or international borders, and for various period of time (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020).

Scholars such as Demko, Ross and Schnell (1970) argue that migration is one of the most intricate aspects of population dynamics, forming an essential component in societal and economic change. It can be understood as a response to challenges within economic, environmental, and social realms, which are often interconnected (Demko, Ross and Schnell 1970).

Modern migration patterns, a key feature of the 'Age of Migration' as described by Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2020), show significant growth in international migration (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020). According to the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN, the global number of international migrants—those residing outside their country of origin for at least one year—rose from 93 million in 1960 to 258 million in 2017. Despite this increase, the proportion of international migrants has remained stable at around 3% of the global population. In 2010, there were 214 million international migrants, though this may underrepresent the true scope, as many are undocumented. Internal migration, particularly rural-to-urban movements, continues to outpace international migration,

especially in countries like China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2017).

One of the most influential theories of migration was proposed by Everett Lee (1966), who distinguished between ‘push’ factors, which drive individuals to leave their country, and ‘pull’ factors, which attract them to a new destination. These factors operate at the micro-level, influencing the individual decisions of what Lee terms ‘rational actors’ who weigh their options before migrating (Lee 1966).

International migration, as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2024), involves individuals crossing national boundaries to establish residence in another country, either temporarily or permanently. This movement often aims at better living conditions or economic opportunities. Scholars like Fabio Baggio (2025) suggest several ways to categorize migrants. Geographically, migrations can be transoceanic, transcontinental, border, neighboring, or regional. Chronologically, they are classified as short-term or long-term, temporary or permanent. Other classifications include demographic/economic factors such as individual, family, skill level, or gender, as well as political and legal status, which divides migrants into regular and irregular (illegal) categories. Additionally, migrants are categorized by whether their migration is voluntary or forced (Baggio 2008; Oswald 2007).

Migration is often associated with both hope and apprehension. For migrants, the prospect of a better life—through improved economic opportunities, living conditions, and access to education—can outweigh the risks of displacement, family separation, or even death while crossing borders. However, the challenges remain substantial, as migrants may face exploitation, discrimination, or legal obstacles in their new host countries (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020).

Host societies have a dual perspective on migration. Historically, settler nations, expanding empires, and strong economies have welcomed immigrants, seeing them as solutions to labor shortages, population growth, and economic stimulation (Phan 2025; Bialas, Lukate and Vertovec 2025; Hadj Abdou and Zardo 2024; Boucher and Gest 2018). However, during times of economic instability or political conflict, migrants are often scapegoated for societal issues, facing discrimination, racism, and sometimes violence, especially when they differ in appearance, behavior, or beliefs from the majority population (Tyrberg 2024; Korol and Bevelander 2023).

Migration is a contentious political issue, often fueled by myths and misconceptions. Claims that migrants take jobs or strain public services lack strong evidence. Research, however, highlights the positive impact of migration on economic growth, innovation, and societal vitality. The increased diversity and transnationalism from migration are seen as beneficial, fostering cooperation and countering nationalism, which drives initiatives like the European Union (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020).

Migration is not solely a reaction to adverse conditions in one’s home country. Rather, it is often driven by the pursuit of better opportunities and lifestyles elsewhere. Although some migrants experience exploitation or abuse, the majority benefit from migration and are able to improve their long-term prospects. While conditions may be challenging, they are often preferable to the limited opportunities available at home—

highlighting why migration remains a consistent global phenomenon (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020).

Migration encompasses two interlinked processes: emigration, the act of leaving one's country of origin, and immigration, the arrival and settlement in a new host country. These dynamics are driven by a combination of push and pull factors, such as economic disparity, conflict, political instability, or the pursuit of better opportunities. While emigration often stems from individuals seeking improved living standards or escaping hardships, immigration reflects the needs of receiving countries to fill labor gaps, sustain economic growth, and address demographic challenges (IOM 2024).

These dual processes highlight the reciprocal relationship between sending and receiving nations. Emigrants contribute to remittances and global knowledge exchange, while immigrants bring diversity, skills, and innovation, though debates about integration and resource allocation remain central (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2020).

Contemporary studies have stressed the importance of going beyond just the analysis of migration volumes, routes, and demographic makeup, and instead focusing on understanding migration mechanisms, social models, and patterns. This shift aims to forecast migration trends more effectively and develop informed migration policies. Theoretical concepts in migration studies have broadened, reflecting more complex and diverse views, and the traditional way of categorizing migrants has become increasingly insufficient for addressing the complexities of modern migration (Lee 1966; Amétépé and Hartmann-Hirsch 2011; Bansal, Taylor and St. James 2005; Ferdous 2024). The current global landscape has given rise to new categories of migrants, such as the term 'relocants', which applies to individuals who, though not refugees in the conventional sense, find themselves in similar situations due to external pressures.

The term 'relocants' is particularly relevant for Russian citizens who have left their country in response to the war in Ukraine. These individuals relocate their families and businesses to countries where they can stay for extended periods without visa restrictions. Many are unable to maintain their businesses in Russia due to the war and the imposition of international sanctions (Guild and Groenendijk 2023). These economic and political pressures serve as push factors, driving relocants to countries where pull factors, such as economic opportunities and a stable living environment, attract them (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022, 164-170; Dicken and Öberg 1996, 101-120; Marois, Bélanger and Lutz 2020, 7690-7695).

Armenia has become one of the countries receiving relocants due to the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine. Within the first six months after Russia's invasion, referred to as the "special military operation" (Nagy 2023; Voitsikhovkyi and Bakumov 2023; Gill 2022), about 1,000 individuals from Ukraine and Belarus, and roughly 40,000 from Russia, relocated to Armenia (Statistical Committee of the RA 2024a, 2024b). Following Russia's announcement of partial mobilization on September 21, 2022, the frequency of flights from Russia to Armenia surged, nearly tripling within a week. According to data from the RA Police, 19,630 people applied for Armenian citizenship during the first ten months of 2022, with 14,661 of these applicants being Russian nationals. A significant majority, around 97%, of those seeking citizenship were ethnic Armenians. A sharp rise in citizenship applications

began immediately after the conflict in Ukraine started. For example, in January and February 2022, the number of applicants was 643 and 892, respectively, while by March, it increased to 1,670, and by October's end, it had reached 2,256 (Muradyan 2022).

### **The push-pull factors of migration**

Apparently, since the start of the war in Ukraine, many immigrants have been moving from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus to Armenia and other countries. All these individuals are often referred to as 'relocants': The term used both by themselves and in the media. In their view, they simply move or relocate rather than undergo a significant life change (Melkumyan and Melkonyan 2023).

In his Push-Pull theory Lee proposes that individuals make rational decisions based on comparing their current conditions with potential opportunities in another location to enhance well-being. Crucial factors include 1) conditions in the area of origin, 2) factors in the destination, 3) intervening obstacles, and 4) personal factors. Economic elements like unemployment, low incomes, and high taxes, along with social and political factors such as poverty and discrimination, are repulsive factors. Conversely, factors like economic development, high incomes, security, and job accessibility are considered pulling factors. Personal circumstances, such as the host country policies, economic conditions for business, and societal attitudes, are also part of push factors (Lee 1966).

Marie McAuliffe identifies the key pulling factors: the host country's resettlement policy, acceptance of immigrants, economic conditions of the host country, the presence of the relevant community, diaspora (McAuliffe 2017). Öberg further develops this theory by categorizing factors into hard (humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, natural disasters) and soft (poverty, social inequality, unemployment) (Öberg 1996).

These theories highlighting the push-pull factors of migration, are relevant to examining repatriation, since factors such as dissatisfaction abroad (push) and the attraction of home country (pull) influence the decision to repatriate (Pham 2018).

### **Repatriation and the notion of homeland in diaspora literature**

As mentioned, push-pull factors influence not only initial migration patterns but also decisions about return, often leading to repatriation. This return migration is driven by changing circumstances in both the host and home countries (Prieto Rosas and López Gay 2015). Push factors, like economic hardship or political instability in the host country, may prompt migrants to reconsider permanent settlement. On the other hand, pull factors in the home country, such as improved stability, economic opportunities, or the desire to reconnect with family and culture, can encourage repatriation.

The theory of diaspora and homeland emphasizes the tension between the host country and the homeland. Diasporas, as transnational spaces, continually negotiate belonging, identity, and memory. Scholars like Safran (1991) suggest that the homeland is not just a geographic place but an emotional and symbolic entity shaping migrants' lives. Migrants who maintain ties with their homeland are often influenced

by emotional pull factors when considering repatriation, with the homeland idealized as a place of origin, history, and identity, fueling the desire to return (Safran 1991).

In the diaspora literature, the homeland is understood as a multifaceted concept, often intersecting with political, social, and cultural aspects of migrants' lives. For instance, in the context of Russian migrants moving to Armenia, the notion of homeland can be understood both in terms of the homeland of origin (Russia) and the homeland of heritage (Armenia). The sense of a "return" can be shaped by not only the political push factors from the home country (Russia) but also by the cultural pull factors to Armenia, where many migrants might identify with their ancestral heritage. These emotional and cultural connections, in combination with practical concerns, create a dynamic where the homeland can be both a site of longing and a complex political and social space (Anderson 1983; Cohen 2008).

Darjeva (2018) explores the concept of the 'ancestral homeland', emphasizing the role of Armenian diaspora organizations in shaping the perception of Armenia as a homeland within the Global South. She highlights how these organizations contribute to both the physical and symbolic 'rooting' of a diaspora that continues to evolve as a highly modern and cosmopolitan community (Darjeva 2018).

Thus, repatriation is not only about returning to a physical place but also involves theories of belonging, where the notion of homeland becomes a fluid and shifting concept (Brah 1996). Diasporic communities constantly renegotiate what home means, whether through return or ongoing connections with the homeland, underscoring the complex relationship between push-pull factors, repatriation, and the homeland (Clifford 1994; Owotemu 2025).

### **The research context**

Armenia's repatriation history reveals Armenians returning home for diverse reasons and a profound connection to their roots, the 'ancestral homeland'. The Museum of Repatriation details distinct phases, including Genocide survivors seeking refuge in Soviet Armenia from 1921 to 1936, contributing to the workforce, the 1946-1949 Great Repatriation driven by Soviet territorial claims involving over 90,000 Armenians, and individual immigration from 1950 to 1961 with approximately 4,000 Armenians from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania. After the Soviet Union's collapse, Armenians, especially from the diaspora, returned to support the newly independent Armenian state in the early 1990s. The Artsakh conflict in the 1990s also prompted Armenians worldwide to return and aid their homeland (Chernobrov and Wilmers 2020; Koinova 2021). Following a late 1990s ceasefire, another wave of repatriation occurred as Armenians sought to contribute to Armenia's reconstruction and development in the 2000s (Iskandaryan 2023).

Neil Hauer's 2019 report on Eurasianet highlighted the increasing momentum of repatriation, particularly after the Velvet Revolution in April 2018 (Asriyan and Melkonyan 2019). As reported by Hrant Mikaelian, a statistician and researcher at the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan, over 15,000 people migrated to Armenia in 2018, marking the highest figure in 12 years (Hauer 2019). As a result, around 50,000 repatriates have settled in Armenia since Armenia's independence in 1991. Alongside

with these repatriation processes the net migration was negative until 2022 ((Statistical Committee of the RA 2024a, 2024b).

Nowadays, events such as the Russian armed invasion of Ukraine pose challenges to international peace and security, impacting states and the global order (Voitsikhovkyi and Bakumov 2023). In the aftermath of this conflict, a unique migration trend has emerged within the Armenian diaspora, beckoning Armenians back to their ancestral homeland.

Repatriation holds profound implications for individuals and receiving countries, reflecting a strong tie to cultural heritage and national identity. Following the 44-day Artsakh conflict in 2020 and the subsequent attack on September 13, 2022, by the Azerbaijani armed forces, Armenia is facing a neither war, nor peace situation. With Artsakh now controlled by Azerbaijan, Armenia confronts post-war security, economic, social, and political crises, remaining under the constant threat of renewed hostilities. The National Statistical Committee reports a 0.3% decrease in the birth rate in 2023 compared to 2022 (Statistical Committee of the RA 2024a, 2024b). As Armenia grapples with conflict aftermath and demographic shifts, the diaspora's return becomes crucial for the nation's rebuilding and revitalization efforts.

## **Research Methodology**

This research employs a comprehensive qualitative approach to investigate the push-pull factors influencing Armenians' repatriation amid the Ukrainian crisis. Secondary analysis of official statistics by The National Statistical Committee of the RA, Museum of Repatriation data and relevant content analysis was carried out. The textual documents were studied to examine various sources related to Armenian repatriation amid the Ukrainian crisis. The process involved following steps:

1. Selection of Sources,
2. Data Collection and Categorization,
3. Coding and Thematic Analysis,
4. Interpretation and Triangulation.

Data from The National Statistical Committee of the RA provided quantitative insights into migration trends and demographic changes. The sources from the Museum of Repatriation provided historical and contemporary records of repatriation experiences, policies, and personal testimonies, secondary insights into factors influencing migration, helping to validate or contrast findings. The collected data were categorized based on key themes such as economic conditions, security concerns, national identity, and policy incentives. The coding framework was developed to identify recurring themes in narratives and official documents. Based on the data collected the trends in repatriation motives were established. The findings were cross-verified with statistical data to ensure reliability. Thematic patterns were compared with historical migration waves and geopolitical developments to contextualize repatriation trends. By employing content analysis, this research systematically examined qualitative data to derive meaningful conclusions about the factors influencing Armenian repatriation during the Ukrainian crisis.

Forty in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted to gather diverse perspectives from repatriates who returned to Armenia following the Russian-

Ukrainian war that began on February 24, 2022, and to obtain detailed first-hand accounts. These methods enabled a nuanced understanding of migration patterns and the key factors influencing integration and long- or short-term settlement in Armenia. The interviews included 20 participants each from Russia and Ukraine. In-depth interview format allowed for open-ended discussions while maintaining consistency across interviews. The following topics were discussed during the interviews: push factors of migration from the country of citizenship, pull factors for migration to Armenia, repatriation experiences (e.g., challenges, adaptation, integration support), settlement plans. During the focus group discussions the community integration challenges, social and economic adaptation, expectations vs. realities of repatriation were discussed. The moderator ensured equal participation, guiding discussions to maintain focus and fostered the participants to share their experiences, compare perspectives, and debate solutions to integration challenges.

To select the interviewees and participants of the focus group discussion the combination of snowball and purposive sampling technics was employed. The purposive sampling aimed to ensure diversity in age, occupation, and family composition.

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded after the oral informed consent of all the participants. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed using thematic and narrative analyses approaches. All interview and FGD transcripts underwent qualitative coding to identify recurring themes and patterns. The push-pull framework was applied to categorize data based on factors influencing migration decisions. Thematic patterns were cross-analyzed between individual interviews and FGDs to ensure validity and reliability. By analyzing push and pull factors of migration the research aimed to enhance understanding of migration patterns influenced by events such as the Russian-Ukrainian war and paid specific attention to the key elements for better integration and long-term settlement of repatriates (Welfens 2022; George and Sandler 2022; Zubok 2023).

### **Analysis of push factors from Ukraine and Russia**

Emigration from Russia after the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army in 2022 is the largest wave of emigration from the country since the collapse of the USSR (Kamalov, Kostenko, Sergeeva and Zavadskaya 2022). Accordingly, a distinctive migration pattern has unfolded within the Armenian diaspora, enticing Armenians to return to their ancestral homeland. According to data from the RA Police, 19,630 individuals sought Armenian citizenship in the initial ten months of 2022, with the vast majority (97%) having Armenian roots (Muradyan 2022). Administrative records from the State Register of the RA Population, Migration, and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs reveal substantial fluctuations in interstate movements of RA citizens between 2022 and 2023. In 2022, a total of 6,839 movements were recorded, with 3,326 arrivals from Russia and 146 from Ukraine. However, in 2023, there was a remarkable surge in total registered movements, reaching 39,518. Movements from Russia increased to 4,187, while those from Ukraine slightly decreased to 125 (Statistical Committee of the RA 2024a, 2024b).



Summarizing the circumstances contributing to emigration from Russia and Ukraine, the following push-pull factors can be distinguished:

1. **Armed conflict forcing to seek safer environment:** The Russia-Ukraine conflict has created an unstable environment, prompting individuals to seek safer locations, and Armenia is perceived as a more stable option. Notably, the Ukrainian war as a push factor is more evident among repatriates from Ukraine.

*"I feel like I'm home again, safer and secure. One can never say what will happen there with them. Everything was so vague and unstable." (male, 31 years old)*

*"I'm not sure if I would have had the courage to move to Armenia alone if it weren't for the war in Ukraine, but now I'm sure that my main home is Armenia." (female, 25 years old)*

*"During the war in Ukraine I was forced to leave and go to Yerevan all alone; I didn't have any other choice." (male, 40 years old).*

2. **Fear of instability and future:** The relocants have a fear if the war will be continuous. Even considering that it will end, they still have an anxiety over the outburst of a new war. Hence, they see no stable peace in Ukrainian conflict resolution, and, as a result, they have concerns of the well-being and future of themselves and their children (especially in Ukraine).

*"The end of Ukraine war is so relative. It can end and start again; peace will take much longer. We have a child, it's really hard to make decisions— it is a war after all." (female, 36 years old).*

3. **The hazards associated with the worsening economic conditions in Russia,** including the devaluation of the ruble, sanctions, and other related factors.

*"And finally, you realize there's no better place but for your homeland. Life had become more expensive in Russia. It is easier, calmer and more comfortable in Armenia." (male, 33 years old).*

4. **Sociocultural Alienation:** the feeling of being foreign where they live. Interviewees report experiencing psychological and social disconnection in Russia and Ukraine. Despite their legal ties, including citizenship and education acquired in these countries, they often felt culturally out of place.

*"In Ukraine, I didn't feel fully myself. Feels like I've come to life here again, but in Kiev my potential seemed to be extinguishing. I felt so odd there, and sometimes walking along the streets I think: "God, why is everything so foreign?" (female, 38 years old).*

### Analysis of pull factors to Armenia

In 2022, over 25,000 compatriots applied for Armenian citizenship, marking a record since 1991. The trend of repatriation has been steadily increasing in recent years. Traditionally, the majority of citizenship applicants hailed from Armenian communities in the Middle East. However, in 2022, influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the highest number of applications since 2021 came from Russia. The Head of Division at the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, stated that the Repatriation Office received an unprecedented 10,000 applications in 2022. In 2022, over 25,000 compatriots applied for Armenian citizenship, with more

than 19,000 receiving passports (Armenpress 2023b). Families from both developed and economically disadvantaged countries were part of the repatriation process.

In April 2023, the Chief of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs noted that the strong trends of repatriation were persisting in 2023. From January to March 2023, the office registered 1000 letters, 200 calls, and 60 visits, indicating sustained interest. The Repatriation and Integration Center, opened in 2023 received 400-500 compatriots monthly seeking assistance. As H. Aleksanyan, Head of the Strategy Development Department at the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, emphasized, repatriation includes three stages: preparation for repatriation, repatriation, and integration, lasting from six months to two years (Armenpress 2023a). Common concerns include education, healthcare, citizenship procedures, and the logistics of relocating personal belongings. Employment and housing challenges remain significant, prompting the center to engage state bodies for additional support if needed.

It should be noted that the pull factors attracting Armenians to their homeland significantly depend on their backgrounds, specifically the history behind their migration to Russia or Ukraine. These pull factors hold particular relevance and strength for individuals born in Armenia who relocated to Russia or Ukraine at a more conscious age. This is also true for those who have consistently maintained connections with Armenia, their families, and relatives, visiting their homeland frequently.

Conversely, for those born in Russia or Ukraine with weaker or no ties to their homeland, the pull factors are not as compelling.

Taking into account the different push factors from Russia and Ukraine, as well as the varied backgrounds and aims of Armenians, the following categories of pull factors can be distinguished:

**1. Social-psychological pull factors.** The repatriation often evokes a sense of belonging and a warm feeling of homecoming. The war between Russia and Ukraine awakens desire to contribute to the rebuilding and strengthening of one's own country during challenging times. Armenians abroad saw the dual crises as an opportune moment to return and actively engage in rebuilding efforts in their homeland.

*"Deep down I have the feeling that I am needed here, and here is exactly where I need to be." (male, 33 years old).*

*"I always thought that it was worth living and developing your own country, not someone else's." (female, 44 years old).*

**2. Seeking Security and Safety.** In the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, they desire for a stable and secure environment, free from the conflicts experienced in the previous location.

*"It's calmer and secure here. I feel safe." (male, 25 years old).*

*"I feel very safe as a young woman. This is one of the factors why my parents let me come here alone." (female, 29 years old).*

**3. Familial and Historical Connection.** For repatriates who have consistently visited their homeland, the strong familial ties and historical connections serve as a significant pull factor. The sense of family roots and the continuity of traditions make Armenia a meaningful and familiar destination. Additionally, some Armenians seek to

find their life partners with Armenian heritage, contributing to the preservation of family traditions and Armenian genes.

*"As an Armenian, it is much better to invest to my own nation and give birth to Armenian children, raise them properly in Armenian society so that they don't grow up in another country like me."* (male, 33 years old).

**4. Networking and Community Engagement.** The desire to build networks and actively engage with the Armenian community becomes a pull factor, especially for those who want to connect with like-minded individuals, participate in community events, and contribute to the social fabric of the country.

*"The friendly attitude of Armenians makes it easier for networking and it feels like having an extended family here."* (male, 38 years old).

**5. Comfortable Pace of Life.** Life in Armenia, particularly in Yerevan, offers a distinct contrast to the fast-paced environments of big cities. The manageable size of it lets individuals reach desirable destination within a short time, eliminating the constant rush and tension. This slower, more relaxed pace contributes to a sense of ease and emotional calmness.

*"Since the country is small, life pace is more convenient here. For example, in Yerevan you can walk around the entire city in 1.5-2 hours. You don't stand on thorns, stressed that you will always be late"* (male, 25 years old).

**6. Educational Pursuits.** The presence of distinctive educational offerings, such as language courses, cultural studies, and specialized programs, may act as a pull factor for diaspora Armenians eager to deepen their knowledge about their homeland through more structured means. Some Armenians from the diaspora opt to pursue studies at local universities, even with Russian as the primary language for practical use. This choice not only aids in their integration with fellow students but also facilitates a closer connection to the vibrant youth culture in Armenia.

*"I had a clear understanding from within that it was in Armenia that I needed to pass the point of growing up study. For me, the most comfortable would be here - I felt it."* (male, 25 years old).

**7. Cultural Ties.** The shared language, history and traditions prompt individuals and families to return and reconnect with their roots in Armenia, making the integration smoother. Knowing Armenian language becomes a significant pull factor, opposed to the need to learn a new language in other countries. Namely, knowing the language is a vital aspect in the process of adaptation.

*"What holds me here is my huge family and many relatives in Armenia, close and dear people, the friendly atmosphere, comfort, the safety."* (female, 44 years old).

*"I have a house here, and I can freely contact everyone since I know the language."* (male, 33 years old).

**8. Contribution to the Homeland.** The war between Russia and Ukraine awakens desire to contribute to the rebuilding and strengthening of one's own country during challenging times. Armenians abroad saw the dual crises as an opportune moment to return and actively engage in rebuilding efforts in their homeland.

*"I always thought that it was worth living and developing your own country, not someone else's."* (male, 33 years old).

**9. Entrepreneurial Opportunities.** Some repatriates see Armenia as a land of entrepreneurial possibilities. The chance to contribute to the local economy, start businesses, and participate in the development of the business landscape becomes an attractive pull factor after the economic crisis in Russia.

*“Since we were given the opportunity to find our office, everything has changed for 80%. It was the basis for our stay, and if the business is successful, we will stay.” (male, 38 years old).*

### **Analysis of push factors from Armenia**

We have discussed in detail the factors that led Armenians from Russia and Ukraine to move to Armenia, contributing to their permanent stay and eventual repatriation. However, it is essential to recognize the push factors that may compel those who immigrated due to the Russian-Ukrainian war to leave Armenia, potentially hindering their repatriation. These factors encompass a spectrum of concerns, ranging from security considerations and economic challenges to issues related to infrastructure, professional growth, and the overall repatriation system. Here are the main potential push factors from Armenia:

**1. Security Concerns** stemming from regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions are potential push factors for repatriates, who seek safety and stability, as conflicts with Azerbaijan could lead to the outbreak of a new war.

*“I have two homelands - Armenia and Ukraine. And I have worries about both of them...I have pessimistic views on the state of the country.” (male, 25 years old).*

*“We escaped the war there, but a new war might break anytime here. We are double-stressed, and the whole nation is in stress now. The only thing that soothes me is being home again and reuniting with relatives and friends.” (female, 44 years old).*

The central issue is the dichotomy between safety and security in repatriation. Returning individuals seek stability, comfort, and a sense of belonging in their homeland, and safety here is a pull factor. Yet, they also seek broader security, which is push factor due to geopolitical complexities, economic instability, and a lack of comprehensive support. The contradiction between safety and security is a central challenge in repatriation. While Armenia provides cultural and personal safety, broader economic and geopolitical uncertainties act as push factors that may drive repatriates away. Addressing these challenges through targeted policies and support systems is essential for ensuring long-term integration and retention of returnees.

**2. Language Barrier and Communication Challenges** can present a significant obstacle, especially for those who did not grow up in an Armenian-speaking environment. Communication challenges may lead to a sense of isolation, hindering effective integration and contributing to feelings of being disconnected.

*“I find it hard to pronounce certain Armenian letters and hence I have a strong Russian accent. It makes me feel self-conscious.” (female, 37 years old).*

**3. Struggle with Identity and Values.** Individuals who grew up in non-Armenian environments might experience a struggle with their identity and values, feeling torn

between the cultural influences of their birthplace and the desire to reconnect with Armenian roots. This internal conflict can act as a push factor.

*"I have two homes: Ukraine and Armenia. Even if I stem from here, the majority of my conscious life was spent there, and I miss the other "home," whether I am In Armenia or in Ukraine." (male, 25 years old).*

The two primary adaptation strategies can be categorized as "adaptation based on integration" and "adaptation based on psychological defense or isolation." Some Armenians make concerted efforts to connect or reconnect with fellow Armenians, relatives, and to build networks. Meanwhile, there are individuals who distance themselves from the local community, interacting exclusively with other Russian or Ukrainian relocants. Moreover, their sense of self-worth is influenced not only by their professional success but also by their adaptation process.

**4. The Sense of Not Being Valued by the Government.** As some interviewees mentioned, challenge lies in the government's understanding of the value of repatriates, inhibiting the development of their ideas and innovations.

*"I think the government doesn't really value the worth of repatriates in Armenia, especially those who really want to do something for their country, but it turns vice versa, you are more limited here." (female, 44 years old).*

*"I came here for a better life here and to finally get peace of mind. Still, I can't have a clear vision on what I will do next." (male, 28 years old).*

**5. Cultural Adjustment and Differences in Mentalities.** Armenians raised in non-Armenian communities in Russia or Ukraine may face challenges in adapting to the cultural nuances and mentalities prevalent in Armenia. Differences in ways of thinking and value systems could lead to a sense of alienation or feeling out of place.

*"Growing up in Ukraine, in most of the cases, I have a different viewpoint, for which many people tend to judge me. People here live with each other's lives." (female, 37 years old).*

**6. Limited Infrastructure and Services.** The current state of infrastructure and public services in Armenia are considered as insufficient by some repatriates. Concerns refer to the access to quality education, transportation, digitalization of services, etc.

*"Transport causes discomfort, sometimes I get mad that it's not like in Ukraine". (male, 38 years old).*

*"In Ukraine, everything was more automated, for instance queues, payments. But here some payments are still in cash and you need to prepare the amount in advance to pay through easy pay. On the other hand, such issues encourage to look for ways to improve the quality of life in Armenia, and create on our own if something is missing. Armenia is not a bad field of business opportunities." (male, 25 years old).*

**7. Limited Opportunities for Professional Growth.** Some individuals perceive limited opportunities for achieving greater advancement and development.

*"My child is a football player and he has big goals, but I'm a bit afraid about the lack of the proper conditions for his professional growth here." (female, 37 years old).*

## Conclusion and discussion

The findings of this study highlight the intricate dynamics influencing the repatriation of Armenians from Russia and Ukraine, shedding light on the interplay between push and pull factors. The decision to return to Armenia is shaped by both external circumstances and deeply personal motivations, reflecting a complex migration landscape.

One of the most significant findings emerging from the analysis is the role of security concerns as both a push and pull factor. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has prompted many Armenians to leave due to instability, fear of mobilization, conscription, and economic downturns in their host countries. Simultaneously, Armenia is perceived as a relatively safer environment, particularly for those who have deep-rooted cultural and familial ties. However, the geopolitical tensions in the region, particularly Armenia's own security challenges following the Artsakh conflict, create an ambivalent scenario for repatriates, as concerns over future instability persist. Furthermore, the geopolitical situation in general is also a restraining factor preventing their further mobility. The question 'Where to go?' has no ambiguous answer. This dichotomy manifests itself and becomes a serious safety concern.

Economic factors also play a crucial role in repatriation decisions. The study reveals that worsening economic conditions in Russia, exacerbated by international sanctions and currency devaluation, have motivated many Armenians to seek opportunities elsewhere. In contrast, some returnees view Armenia as a place where they can contribute meaningfully, especially in entrepreneurial ventures. However, concerns over limited professional growth, inadequate infrastructure, and lower salaries in Armenia remain significant deterrents. This paradox highlights the need for targeted economic policies to support repatriates in securing stable employment, fostering business initiatives, and filling labor gaps in key economic sectors.

Psychological and sociocultural dimensions of repatriation are equally critical. The study underscores that many Armenians returning to their homeland experience a strong emotional pull, fueled by a sense of belonging and national identity. Repatriates often cite the comfort of a familiar culture, shared language, and the presence of an Armenian community as key motivators for their decision. However, for those who have spent most of their lives in Russia or Ukraine, the adaptation process can be challenging, particularly due to differences in mentality, bureaucratic hurdles, and occasional societal resistance to newcomers. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the need for effective integration policies that address linguistic, cultural, and social barriers faced by returnees. Stereotypes within the host society create significant barriers for integration and economic participation, potentially acting as a push factor for repatriates if efforts to promote tolerance and inclusivity are insufficient. Preconceived notions about newcomers may lead to discrimination in employment, housing, and social interactions, making it more difficult for repatriates to establish themselves.

Ultimately, the study highlights the dual nature of repatriation as both an opportunity and a challenge. While many Armenians are drawn back to their homeland by cultural, social, and security-related motivations, structural deficiencies in Armenia's economic and political landscape may lead some to consider re-emigration.

These findings call for a holistic approach to repatriation policy—one that not only facilitates return but also ensures the long-term retention and well-being of repatriates. Policymakers must develop targeted strategies that enhance economic prospects, strengthen social integration mechanisms, and improve overall infrastructure to maximize the benefits of repatriation for both individuals and Armenian society as a whole.

Repatriation involves a process of successful adaptation for newcomers, which presents a significant socio-psychological challenge upon arrival. This challenge serves as a threshold that migrants must navigate, while the receiving society must also adjust to accommodate them. Successful adaptation requires a mutual process where both returnees and the host society work toward restoring a sense of safety, security, and belonging.

The repatriation of Armenians in the aftermath of the Ukrainian conflict is a multifaceted process. According to some authors, there are two distinct adaptation strategies: successful adaptation, also known as ‘adaptation based on integration’, and unsuccessful adaptation, referred to as ‘adaptation based on psychological defense or isolation’. This dichotomy is illustrated by the fact that some Armenians actively seek to connect or reconnect with their compatriots, relatives, make networks, and embrace more of the local traditions. Conversely, there are people who choose to isolate themselves from the local community, exclusively interact with other circles of Russian or Ukrainian relocants, and may perceive themselves as outsiders, potentially considering a return to the country they have moved from when conditions improve there. Not only does the newcomers’ successful work activity matter, but the absence of significant distortions in their self-perception and self-esteem also depends on the success of the adaptation process. Key factors influencing adaptation include the chosen occupation, language proficiency, the presence of relatives or friends in the host country, the sense of belonging, the constant ties with their homeland and have social and economic capital here.

Here, the dichotomy between safety and security emerges as a central issue. As the pull factors of repatriation are rooted in the notion of safety, the homeland becomes a place where individuals seek to find stability by returning to the familiar, the comfort, experiencing the sense of belonging. Meantime, the push factors often stem from a yearning for broader security. Safety, in the context of returning to one’s roots, encompasses the emotional and psychological dimensions of finding safety and comfort. However, security involves a broader protective shield against external threats and challenges, which is challenging to attain within the complex geopolitical context, economic instability and lack of a wholesome support mechanism.

The hard push factors, mostly originating from the military conflicts in Ukraine and Russia, accompanied by humanitarian crises gives rise to fear and anxiety, compelling individuals to seek safer environments. Meanwhile, push factors such as security concerns, economic challenges, patchy repatriation initiatives, limited infrastructures and professional growth may prompt some repatriates to emigrate again, this time, from Armenia.

Recognizing the significance of improving push factors in Armenia is crucial for facilitating successful long-term repatriation. These individuals have already faced

despair and crises due to the Ukrainian war, experiencing all its negative impacts. Therefore, it is imperative to create a safe and secure environment, within opportunities for growth and development. Beyond economic factors, social and psychological support mechanisms are essential for ensuring the well-being of returnees. Finally, infrastructure and urban development remain critical for enhancing quality of life.

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### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### Ethical standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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