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# ***The demographic and economic framework of circular migration in Azerbaijan***

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The term “circular migration” is not used in Azerbaijan or, indeed, in many other countries of the former Soviet Union, as it is unclear and inadequate. The authorities do not keep records of migrants working regularly abroad who financially support their families back home and who, on a regular basis, or after a certain period, return home. The only registered people are those who emigrate or immigrate permanently. Even when the exact number of migrants who successfully land a job abroad or in Azerbaijan on a contractual basis is understood, there is no detailed information or records. The only data available comes from other countries and international organizations. For example, the Russian authorities have recently begun to register those migrants granted temporary residence and work permit, though this does not include everyone: in fact, it includes only a small number of migrants. Most Azerbaijani migrants work in Russia irregularly.

There are reasons why the term “circular migration” is not used in either state migration programs, or in academic research. The role of the state is at the heart of circular migration. The state to a large extent defines migration forms and is in charge of the social protection of migrants and migration monitoring. However, the role of state in migration processes was not very significant in Azerbaijan in the early post-Soviet period. And often it was altogether absent, and migration processes developed on their own.

After Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991, many citizens started to leave the country in search of jobs. In the 1990s the main flow was directed to Russia and other CIS countries due to the absence of problems associated with language and communication, as well as the absence of a visa regime. This aspect of migration in Azerbaijan was seen as part of the labor migration, both regular and irregular. However, it had all the signs of circular migration, as a significant share of labor migrants from Azerbaijan then considered their departure to Russia and other CIS countries as a temporary and necessary step. Hence Russia and other CIS countries were perceived by labor migrants from Azerbaijan not as sovereign states, but as an economic resource, i.e. countries where migrants arrived temporarily with one priority, earning money. However, for many objective and subjective reasons only a small fraction of Azerbaijani labor migrants lived and worked in Russia and CIS countries regularly working under contracts. Meanwhile, they had close ties with their families in the home country, but due to a complex and unclear situation in Azerbaijan they did not rush to come back, preferring to send money to their families and only occasionally returning home.

There were other reasons as well for temporary emigration: young people got an opportunity to receive good education abroad and some people left for medical treatment. Azerbaijani public institutions did not play any role in this migration dynamic. Everything was done by citizens themselves or at the expense of foreign funds or organizations. Initially preference was given to emigration to Russia and CIS countries. Then they got an opportunity to work, study and undergo treatment in Turkey, Iran and other Eastern countries.

Soon, in the late 1990s, an opportunity emerged to study in the best educational institutions of the West. Some young people left to study there, having received scholarships from international organizations and foreign embassies in Baku. These scholarships were mostly granted by the U.S. and French embassies, the British Council, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Open Society Institute (Soros Fund). However, most students left on their own.

And yet again, the state was not taking part in these processes. Azerbaijani citizens resolved their problems independently or relying on the assistance of those charitable organizations that helped them depart for work or training. The process was to a large extent uncontrolled and was not registered anywhere. That is why there is very little information, and the data are incomplete: no details on social, demographic and other parameters of those who left to work, study or undergo treatment, besides there are no guarantees that the available data are correct.

In addition, the events of the early 1990s led to the collapse of the old state machine in Azerbaijan, particularly the monitoring and registration system.

By the late 1990s the situation in the country had stabilized somewhat. At this point there was the possibility of fully reconstructing the system of population registration, as well as restoring public structures in regulation and assistance to citizens in their migration aspirations. This included circular migration, as the latter's role and significance have been growing. In this period, new directions came up in the migration aspirations of Azerbaijani citizens. Now more and more citizens traveled to Western countries, as well as the Muslim countries of the East. And inevitably legal issues came up, not only because of the visa regime, but also because of the need for legal residence and the right to work. Migrants now needed contracts in the destination countries, which is something that they did not have in Russia and other CIS countries.

On the other hand, as tension escalated in the Middle East, especially around Iran and Iraq, the flow of irregular migrants to Azerbaijan became more and more tangible. During the creation of the oil pipeline in Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan and the activation of Western and other companies in the Caucasus, the number of regular and irregular migrants from other countries visibly increased in Azerbaijan.

Under these circumstances more attention was devoted to migration issue in Azerbaijan, including to the resolution of legal issues. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) played a crucial role in the change of the Azerbaijani authorities' attitudes to migration policy. Finally, in 1998-2000 more than 50 normative and legal acts were adopted to regulate the migration and labor activities of the population (Yunusov, 2003, p. 235).

Let us note that the term "circular migration" is absent from these legal acts and documents, as the IOM, the main partner of Azerbaijan assisting in development of the legislation, does not use this term.

But what is more important is that these documents allowed the regulation of activities of numerous companies that emerged in the late 1990s and which sent Azerbaijani citizens abroad, while attracting labor migrants to the country. Now organizations willing to use the foreign workforce in Azerbaijan must apply to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, in order to obtain a special permit in the form of a license. The following fact demonstrates that these legal documents are crucial and timely: as of early 2003, more than 100 foreign companies applied to this Ministry and obtained licenses giving a right to invite a foreign workforce to the country (Yunusov, 2003, p.238).

Legal acts were adopted to regulate and assist migrants in Azerbaijan in their labor activities abroad and new migration structures were established. Finally, 19 March 2007 a Presidential decree established the State Migration Service (SMS) that was entrusted with the formation of the "state policy in migration, development of governance system, regulation and forecast of migration processes, coordination of activities of relevant state institutions". In other words, a special public institution emerged in Azerbaijan that was responsible for migration policy formation and the resolution of migration-related problems.

After this it seems that an opportunity emerged for the improvement of the situation in migration, in connection with the arrangement of the regular departure of Azerbaijani citizens overseas and the attraction of foreign labor migrants to the country. However, in reality the situation did not change much. A foreign workforce procedure does not cover CIS citizens coming to Azerbaijan, as there is no visa regime for them. That is why they do not see the need to register, associated with bureaucratic red-tape and bribes. Besides, many Turkish and Iranian companies and organizations in Azerbaijan do not register foreign specialists, using loopholes in the tax and migration legislation in the destination country.

The regulation of the labor activities of Azerbaijanis abroad is also far from perfect, as legal documents cover only regular persons arranging employment overseas. If Azerbaijanis find jobs on their own (for instance, using a newspaper advertisement or via the Internet), this is nobody's concern. And this is how most citizens depart to work abroad.

There is a special public structure (the State Migration Service) and other agencies regulating migration processes and the departure of citizens abroad as they look for jobs or as they begin their studies there: the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, the State Committee for

Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Affairs, the State Committee for the Affairs of Azerbaijanis Residing Abroad, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Healthcare and Education. However, until now there is no clear idea in society about the scale of the exit and return of citizens. It is impossible to obtain these data in the State Statistics Committee (Goscomstat). There is simply no such information on circular migration on the websites of the relevant public agencies. There is just periodic information or interviews of heads or representatives of these public agencies that come up in mass media on the role of circular migration. Summing them up, one can make the following conclusions:

- Regular migration among Azerbaijanis has three directions (Northern, Western and Eastern) and can be divided into labor, intellectual and educational migration.
- The main destination country in the northern direction for permanent Azerbaijani migrants is Russia.
- In the post-Soviet period, especially in the 1990s, most labor migrants from Azerbaijan were among irregular migrants and their activities were to a large extent criminal, or they did not have employment contracts. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani migrants retained ties with their families in the home country, sent money there and visited them occasionally.

The situation changed after the new migration policy of Russia was adopted in late 2006, which forced Azerbaijani labor migrants to regularize. And for the first time the number of labor migrants from Azerbaijan regularly employed in Russia became known. According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, in 2006 the number of Azerbaijani citizens holding temporary work permits in Russia stood at 28,319, and it increased to 57,562 in 2007 and 76,283 in 2008, to drop again to 60,664 in 2009 and 40,349 in 2010. However, the share of Azerbaijani citizens over the total number of foreign workers in Russia stood at around 3% in these years. Regular labor migrants from Azerbaijan are employed in the wholesale and retail trade, construction, processing industry and transport. Thus, in 2009, 19,000 (31.4%) labor migrants from Azerbaijan were employed in the retail and wholesale trade, 18,900 (31.2%) in construction, 5,400 (9.0%) in the processing industry, 3,200 (5.3%) in transportation (Z.R.Ragimova, M.B. Mamedova. Migration, pp. 99-100).

The situation of western migration was somewhat different. In 1990-2007, 100,000-120,000 citizens went from Azerbaijan to the West (to the US and the European Union) (Yunusov, 2009, p.172). Political refugees and irregular migrants constitute a significant share of Azerbaijani citizens in Western countries. The number of those who come to work or study regularly in the West is extremely small. Mostly they are those who came to work under contracts and special business programs or via employment institutions. In the first case they worked at oil and gas companies, but only a small fraction of Azerbaijani migrants is employed there. For example, there are around 100 migrants from Azerbaijan working in Norway under the contract with an oil company Statoil: "They have a high salary, they live in two- or three-storied mansions, have their own shops, cafes etc. They come to Baku, whenever they wish, and this is paid for by the company. They have no political or other serious problems" (Yunusov, 2009, p.165).

Persons coming to the European Union countries via agencies and employment companies are in a slightly different position. Jobs in western countries were offered to Azerbaijani citizens aged 25-45 in advertisements placed in the mass media by agencies and companies (Table 1).

**Table 1. Jobs offered to Azerbaijani migrants in a number of Western countries (autumn 2001)**

Country	Job offered	Wage	Note
UK	Work at construction sites and factories	5 GBP an hour	Knowledge of English is not mandatory
Spain	1. Men: at construction sites 2. Women: housekeepers, care for the elderly, personnel at restaurants and hotels	Men: 900-1,200 USD a month. Women: 500-600 USD and room and board	Living expenses – 100 USD a month, food expenses – 100 USD. Knowledge of language is not mandatory at first
Italy	Women: housekeepers, maids, personnel at restaurants pizzerias and hotels, care for the elderly	450-600 USD a month (full room and board)	Knowledge of English is desirable, but not mandatory. Accommodation and meals at the expenses of employer
Cyprus	Men: agriculture Women: housekeeping, waitresses, tourism or agriculture	Men: from 10 USD a day and more. Women: from 300 USD and more	Apartment and food at the expense of employer. Knowledge of English is mandatory, Greek is desirable
Portugal	Men: construction workers, brick masons, tillers, plasterer, finishers, unskilled workers Women: cleaning offices, personnel at hotels	Men: from 4.5 USD an hour; unskilled workers – from 3 USD an hour. Women: 35 USD a day	Men: accommodation, 80 USD a month at an apartment or free of charge in construction vans, meals, 70 USD a month. Women: accommodation, 80 USD a month, meals, 80 USD a month
US	Men: unskilled workers at construction site, personnel at fuel stations, janitors at supermarkets Women: nannies/housekeepers, personnel at fuel stations, motels	Men: from 300 to 450 USD a week. Women: from 300 to 350 USD a week	Living conditions: apartment worth 100 USD a month, and meals worth around 100 USD a month. Accommodation and meals at the expense of employer for persons working in family

Source: weekly newspaper “Week” (Baku), 7-13 September 2001

The situation with job offers did not subsequently change much. Meanwhile, Azerbaijanis in European countries strive to get employed in trade, restaurants, Turkish construction companies, car care centers, or they buy used cars to resell them in CIS countries.

However, employment overseas using special agencies did not become popular in Azerbaijan due to mass-scale corruption and bribery, as well as numerous cases of fraud by companies and employers.

In addition to regular employed migrants, a lot of students from Azerbaijan studied in the West. Over the period of 1991-2006 up to 1,000 young citizens of Azerbaijan received education in the US within various educational programs and around 250 in the EU (Hikmet Haji-zadeh, 2007, p.3). After the completion of studies they came back and found jobs. However, as sociological studies and numerous interviews have demonstrated, most such young citizens eventually left the country. They went back to work where they had received their education. The reason was a lack of satisfaction with the situation in the country, corruption and problems in democracy.

Approximately the same is true of the situation with migration to the east. This is mostly irregular labor migration, while a certain share of migrants can regularly find jobs or study opportunities. Here Azerbaijani migrants gave preference to Turkey. Turkish statistical data (table 2) are much more reliable and authentic in this regard. They should be used as a point of reference:

**Table 2. Migration exchange between Azerbaijan and Turkey, 2000-2006, persons**

Years	Arrived in Turkey from Azerbaijan	Departed from Turkey to Azerbaijan	Migration balance
2000	179,878	152,789	-27,089
2001	178,861	148,503	-30,358
2002	163,114	144,266	-18,848
2003	192,645	190,713	-1,932
2004	330,313	326,937	-3,376
2005	411,652	400,703	-10,949
2006	380,132	382,717	2,585
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,836,595</b>	<b>1,746,628</b>	<b>-89,967</b>

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT)

According to the table 2, about 90,000 citizens of Azerbaijan entered Turkey in 2000-2006. About 73,000 were granted residence permits and the right to work in Turkey.

Many scientists work in Turkey, and many young people from Azerbaijan get their education there. Starting from the 1990s qualified and experienced workers in Azerbaijan, mainly physicists and mathematicians began to work in leading universities and scientific agencies in Turkey. Over 2,000 young people from Azerbaijan got Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees in Turkey in 1991-2009 under the "Big Student Project" program initiated by Turkey. Many of the students who had entered a PhD program and defended theses continued to work in leading Turkish universities and scientific organizations (Suleymanov, 2010, p. 111).

The number of Azerbaijani migrants or scientists/students in other countries of the Islamic East is not so big. There are more students in religious universities/colleges and these are mainly in Turkey, Iran and Egypt.

A small number of Azerbaijani citizens enter eastern countries regularly. The talks between Azerbaijan and Middle East countries revealed a demand for doctors, construction workers, drivers and service workers. Azerbaijani medics (doctors and nurses) successfully work in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait and Bahrain. Azerbaijan has especially fruitful cooperation with Saudi Arabia: in 1996 the countries entered into negotiations, and in 1998 the first 21 Azerbaijani medics went to Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, their number steadily increased and by early 2004 about 400 doctors and nurses from Azerbaijan worked in Saudi Arabia. They work on a contractual basis for at least one year with extensions. Yet, over time, they have fallen in number and currently about 200 medics are working in this country. The medical personnel were selected by the specialists from Saudi Arabia. Knowledge of English was a must in addition to required qualification skills. The popularity of Saudi Arabia among Azerbaijani medics can be explained by the working conditions there: a monthly salary of a nurse is USD 1,200 or USD 1.800 for a doctor. Given that the monthly expense of Azerbaijani citizens for food stands at as much as 100, and that accommodation is provided by the receiving party, it goes without saying that doctors come back home with significant amounts of money (Arif Yunusov, Migration, pp. 209-210).

In recent years the oil boom has turned Azerbaijan into a receiving country for labor migrants. In 2009, 8,708 foreign citizens from 88 countries worked in 1,007 enterprises of Azerbaijan with individual permissions. In 2010 a labor migration quota made 10,700 people, in 2011, 9,815 people. In 2010 5,900 permissions were granted to foreign citizens, 2,808 individual permissions were extended.

In 2010 citizens of 80 countries worked in Azerbaijan with work permit; 2,305 were citizens of Turkey, 1,156 were British, 291 were Georgians, and 266 were Indians. The majority (over 90%) of working foreign citizens is represented by males aged 25-35 (Rahimova and Mammedova, 2011).

However, the majority of labor migrants reside irregularly in Azerbaijan and remain there frequently without licenses. Meantime, the increased number of migrants has recently given rise to a migrant phobia among the local population.

Therefore, the brief review shows that the overwhelming majority of Azerbaijani migrants works and stays regularly in other countries; they have poor communication with state agencies, which causes lots of problems for migrants and receiving countries. The same can be said about migrants staying in Azerbaijan. But the main thing is the lack of understanding over circular migration. This understanding can help reduce circular migration and puts irregular emigration and immigration into a legal framework.

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