

Azerbaijan

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	573,000–603,000 (including children of male IDPs)
Percentage of total population	6.7–7.1%
Start of displacement situation	1988
New displacement in 2008	0
Returns in 2008	0
Causes of displacement	International and internal armed conflict, generalised violence
Human development index	97



The situation of most of Azerbaijan's IDPs has been at a standstill as a result of continued political deadlock over the future of Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan claims the territory as its own, while Armenia supports self-determination of the region. Meanwhile, the 650,000 Azerbaijanis originally displaced from Nagorno Karabakh and surrounding districts since 1988 are prevented from claiming their properties and returning to their homes. The Azerbaijani government has nevertheless been pushing for the return of IDPs as a priority over local integration and resettlement. Some IDPs have rebuilt their lives in displacement, but many remain dependent on direct government assistance and have yet to find a durable solution to their plight.

IDPs still struggle to access adequate housing, livelihoods and services such as health care and education. Many IDPs continue to live in accommodation that fails to provide warmth, ventilation or privacy, and puts them at a higher risk of falling ill. Medical services are unaffordable and inadequate, as is the psychiatric and social support of which many are reportedly in need. Many IDPs have left their families and moved from areas of displacement and resettlement to cities in search of jobs, but have struggled to register their new residence and have therefore been unable to access formal employment or government assistance, entitlements and services. The quality of education is also a problem, and some displaced students have dropped out of school because of poverty, movement of families and early marriage.

About half of all IDPs still live in difficult conditions in improvised shelters and collective centres. These are often the most vulnerable IDPs since those able to do so have moved into better housing and improved their lives. Elderly displaced people reportedly have additional and more serious health problems than elderly people who had not been displaced, because of difficulties adapting to new environments, lower family income and less care from their children. According to a 2007 UNHCR assessment of IDPs, children and adolescents needed more privacy, while disabled people, single mothers and orphans had little hope they would achieve living conditions that met their specific needs. Feelings of insecurity and isolation due to war and uncertainty about the future stood in the way of the self-reliance of these vulnerable IDPs.

Despite dim prospects for durable solutions for most IDPs, the government's response to the displacement situation has been positive and considerable, especially in the last few years. In addition to providing regular direct assistance, it has closed the worst settlements and is resettling some IDPs in new homes until return becomes possible. While resettled IDPs have noted an improvement in their housing conditions, the villages are located in isolated and economically depressed areas with infertile land, sometimes close to the line of contact where there are still exchanges of fire between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. An improved national response would entail efforts to ensure the participation of IDPs in decisions that affect them, and acknowledgement of the right of IDPs to freely choose between returning and settling elsewhere. It would also entail improved implementation of programmes to combat poverty and unemployment.

In recent years, humanitarian assistance has largely focused on micro-credit programmes, skills training, food distribution, housing and infrastructure construction and repair. Many humanitarian organisations have gradually reduced their activities for IDPs following decreasing donor support. However, in 2008 the World Bank committed an additional \$15 million to assist 150,000 IDPs with infrastructure reconstruction and shelter repair, and UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council continued to be the main international organisations assisting IDPs. National NGOs continue to provide legal assistance, skills training and micro-credit loans, as well as inform IDPs of their rights and advocate towards the government for improved protection. An improved humanitarian response would only follow increased donor interest, which itself depends on greater prospects for durable solutions.