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ARMENIA

Need to monitor progress towards durable solutions

Some 20 years after the beginning of Armenia's war with Azerbaijan and related violence, information on the remaining 8,400 people internally displaced is scarce. People internally displaced by the conflict have received hardly any government attention because other larger refugee and internally displaced groups have made competing demands on the state budget in a time of economic transition and crisis. International organisations have also largely neglected their plight. The low public profile and lack of registration and monitoring of these internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees have made it difficult to estimate how many have achieved durable solutions.

IDPs and returnees face some of the same challenges as their non-displaced neighbours, and some face additional particular hardships including the loss of or damage to property, the unavailability of property restitution or compensation mechanisms, the inability to visit former homes and the continuing insecurity in border areas. Some suffered psychological trauma during the war, depend on welfare and are only minimally engaged in economic activities.

The remaining IDPs and returnees will not achieve durable solutions until their specific needs are identified and addressed, reconciliation initiatives established and, above all, a peace agreement is realised. There is a need to support IDPs who have chosen to integrate in their place of displacement, accelerate recovery in border areas, create non-agricultural work for returnees and adopt a national housing strategy giving special consideration to IDPs whose housing was damaged or destroyed.

Map of Armenia



Source: United Nations Cartographic Section
More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org

Background

The origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial dispute go back centuries. The current conflict is based on the 1923 Soviet decision to allocate the *oblast* (region) of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, although most of its population were Armenian. When in 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities voted to unite with Armenia, fighting erupted between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh which soon sparked ethnic conflict elsewhere in Azerbaijan. By 1992 this had escalated to full-scale conflict between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Armenian-supported secessionists. By the time a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994, Azerbaijan had lost effective control of Nagorno-Karabakh and several adjacent regions, some 30,000 people had been killed and over a million people were displaced within and from Armenia and Azerbaijan (Cohen and Deng, 1998). The leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1992, following a local referendum, but neither Armenia nor any other state has recognised it. The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities have de facto control over the territory, while Armenia assists it militarily and financially (ICHD, September 2009).

A sustainable negotiated solution to the conflict appears remote. Talks within the framework of the Minsk Group convened by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe continue between Armenia and Azerbaijan without significant progress. Comprised of mediators from France, Russia and the United States, the Minsk Group must reconcile the opposing principles of self-determination and territorial integrity. Armenia refuses to relinquish control over the areas it occupies until mechanisms for determining Nagorno-Karabakh's future status are put in place, while Azerbaijan insists on the non-violability of its internationally recognised frontiers. Meanwhile, both countries are increasing their military budgets and rhetoric (ICHD, September 2009; ICG, 31 January 2008). Some observers be-

lieve the 2009 improvement in relations between Armenia and Turkey could presage a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, as Turkish officials have suggested that they will ratify the agreement with Armenia only when there is a breakthrough in its negotiations with Azerbaijan (RFE/RL, 1 December 2009).

IDP figures and patterns

Internal displacement in Armenia has largely been the result of armed conflict and natural disasters. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh forced about 65,000 people to flee their homes and the 1988 earthquake in the Spitak region rendered some 500,000 people homeless. In 2000 the Armenian government estimated that 100,000 people were still displaced by the 1988 earthquake and about 20,000 by other natural and man-made disasters (UNCHR, 6 November 2000).

A 2004 survey of internally displaced people (IDPs) conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) concluded that there were some 8,400 conflict-induced IDPs remaining, with the rest having returned to their villages, settled elsewhere or emigrated (NRC, 1 March 2005). More recent figures on IDPs are not available.

IDPs who fled the conflict were displaced mainly from areas bordering Azerbaijan. In descending order these included the provinces of Syunik, Tavush, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor and Ararat. Armenians living in Artsvashen, an outlying district of the Armenian province of Gegharkunik completely surrounded by Azerbaijani territory, were also displaced. Many villages were totally evacuated, some more than once. Separation of families was common, as women, children and the elderly were usually the first to leave their villages to live in summer pasture areas, while men stayed behind (Cohen and Deng, 1998; IDMC, November 2009). As the conflict continued, men joined their families and then moved to more cen-

tral locations while some went abroad. By 2004 almost 90 per cent of the remaining 8,400 IDPs were living in Syunik, Tavush and Gegharkunik provinces (NRC, 1 March 2005).

Durable settlement option for IDPs

There are conflicting figures on the number of IDPs who have returned to their homes. In 1998, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believed most IDPs had returned (Cohen and Deng, 1998), while in 2000 the government reported that 28,000 had done so (UNCHR, 6 November 2000). In 2006, NRC reported that more than half had returned (NRC, 2006). However, in 2009 the US State Department reported that most of the original 65,000 IDPs had returned or settled elsewhere, but that about 43,000 could not return due to socio-economic constraints, fear of landmines or because their villages were surrounded by Azerbaijani territory (USDoS, 25 February 2009).

Current information on IDPs who have integrated in the place of displacement or settled elsewhere is not available. In 2004 an NRC survey concluded that 11 per cent of IDPs were living outside of their original villages. There have been no major barriers to integration, but there have also not been any programmes in place to facilitate it (IDMC, November 2009). Some have managed to buy houses, while others rent or look after homes of Armenian labour migrants working abroad. With little prospect of return to Azerbaijani-controlled territory the 3,000 IDPs from Artsvashen have opted for local integration.

Protection issues facing conflict-induced IDPs

Physical security in border areas

Returnees in some border areas are not fully safe. Skirmishes have reportedly continued between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces along the

120-kilometre frontline, which is not supervised by international peacekeepers (ICHD, September 2009). Some returnees have reported that they regularly hear gunfire and explosions extremely close to their villages (IDMC, November 2009). A 2005 landmine impact survey reported that 60 communities in five border provinces were still affected by mines or unexploded ordnance (ICBL, 2009). It is not known whether the Ministry of Defense is currently conducting demining activities (ICBL, 2009). The Armenian government contends that mines along the border with Azerbaijan are essential to its defense and will not be removed until peace is established. The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance has clearly affected returnees' farming livelihoods (IDMC, November 2009; IWPR, 5 July 2007).

Housing situation of IDPs and returnees

Some IDPs and returnees reported in 2009 that their lack of permanent housing was what primarily distinguishes them from their non-displaced neighbours (IDMC, November 2009). Following their displacement, IDPs initially lodged with family or friends or managed to secure temporary accommodation in apartments or public buildings as the government did not offer them housing assistance (Cohen and Deng, 1998). By 2009, most were living in rented accommodation or with relatives and friends. Some had only oral tenancy agreements, earned little and were dependent on landlords. Only a small number had managed to buy homes; banks were reportedly particularly reluctant to lend to IDPs, even those with stable incomes (IDMC, November 2009).

In 2007 the Armenian NGO Legal Guide sent over 200 applications to the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of applicants who fled Artsvashen. The applicants argued that the government of Azerbaijan had violated their right to enjoy their property, among other rights. The Court has yet to decide on the admissibility or merits of these cases.

After the conflict ended, some returnees had to contend with significant damage to their homes. Over 25 per cent of houses in the border regions were damaged and three per cent were destroyed (NRC, 1 March 2005). Many schools, health posts, roads, and water and irrigation systems were also in need of reconstruction and repair. Returnees reported that there had been no secondary occupation of their homes and they were able to repossess them without interference (IDMC, November 2009). They mainly rebuilt houses on their own, but some enjoyed offers of accommodation and labour from relatives.

Local governments provided some limited assistance for reconstruction in 1994, and some IDPs from Artsvashen also received housing assistance. Recognising that this group had minimal prospects of return, in 2007 NRC repaired homes for them in the town of Chambarak (NRC, 30 January 2008). Some IDPs from Artsvashen were also reportedly given \$400 in 1992 to buy houses from members of the Molokan community who were emigrating.

Many IDPs who fled their homes as a result of the 1988 earthquake experience ongoing housing difficulties. Thousands have lived in settlements of *domiks* (shipping containers) for over two decades, although they were intended to be temporary housing. While they all have electricity, containers lack insulation, making them unbearably hot in the summer and cold in the winter. Some residents have interior plumbing while others depend on outdoor taps. Some have renovated their containers and now own them, while others rent and contend with vermin and leaking roofs. Recently, some residents have been forcibly resettled to another *domik* settlement as the government has sold the land without consulting or giving notice to residents. The last such eviction was in September 2009. Private houses and buildings have been constructed in the place of some removed containers.

Unstable incomes of IDPs and returnees

There is limited specific information on the employment or income status of IDPs and returnees. In 2004 about 70 per cent of IDPs considered themselves economically self-sufficient (NRC, 1 March 2005). While some IDPs and returnees employed by the state have fixed salaries, many still lack stable employment and regular income (IDMC, November 2009). Those who have chosen to integrate in their area of displacement have had to adapt to an urban labour environment. Agriculture is the main source of income in return areas, followed by temporary jobs, old age pensions and family welfare payments.

Conflict and the subsequent internal displacement crisis occurred just as the difficult transition to a market economy and new political system marked a steep decline in living standards across Armenia. The economic crisis was exacerbated by the closure of borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Enterprises manufacturing textiles, shoes, processed foods and cigarettes in border areas closed and have not reopened. IDPs and others in border areas were hard hit. In 2009 Syunik and Tavush provinces had the highest unemployment rates among return areas, 11.8 per cent and 9.0 per cent respectively, compared to 6.3 per cent in Yerevan, the Armenian capital (Government of Armenia, December 2009).

Market reforms and the privatisation of farms have transformed the farming sector on which most IDPs were primarily dependent prior to the conflict. Meanwhile, much cultivable land in border areas lies unused due to shortages of modern agricultural equipment, expertise, seeds and labour. Irrigation systems are still damaged and landmines pose risks for farmers (IOM, January 1999; UNCHR, 6 November 2000; ACF 2009). Poor roads and high transportation costs prevent farmers from taking products to market. Armenia is dependent on imports for 60 per cent of the wheat it consumes (UN FAO, 15 December 2008). In 2006, the government adopted the

Agricultural Sustainable Development Strategy to assist the agricultural sector (Government of Armenia, 2006), but the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has since urged it to focus more on agriculture (UN FAO, 15 December 2008).

Poverty alleviation programmes have not addressed IDPs' particular vulnerabilities. The state welfare system (known as PAROS) makes special provision for the additional vulnerability of being a refugee, but does not give similar weighting to internal displacement. As the PAROS system does not specifically identify IDPs it is impossible to assess the number who receive social benefits. IDPs have reported that assessment of their socio-economic status is often dependent on the whims of government inspectors (IDMC, November 2009). In theory they should revisit the homes of recipients every three months to confirm their circumstances, but some are bribed not to do so (IDMC, November 2009).

Education in conflict-affected villages

Returnees report that children generally go to school, study hard and are increasingly pursuing higher education (IDMC, November 2009). While some parents, usually the poorest and most socially disadvantaged, have been unable to register the birth of children, potentially depriving them of essential social services, this does not seem to have prevented their access to education: in Armenia 98 per cent of school-age children are enrolled (USDoS, 25 February 2009; World Bank, 2007).

The main shortcoming in education in conflict-affected areas is quality. The number of schools, teachers and supplies are adequate to meet students' needs but many schools need to be renovated and some teachers need additional training. Many educational facilities are under-funded, though major renovations have been initiated in some areas with government and foreign funding. Lack of funds for heating fuel means some schools have extended winter breaks (USDoS, 25 February 2009). Some parents report teachers use outdated

teaching methods and the curriculum does not prepare their children for the university entrance exam. As a result, parents turn to private tutoring to improve their children's prospects of tertiary education (IDMC, November 2009). Some teachers have solicited bribes for good grades (USDoS, 25 February 2009).

Some households depend on income from children. A 2007 study showed that about six per cent of households had at least one child involved in paid work. Most were boys between the ages of 14 and 18, working in agriculture, trade and construction. A third of them were below the legal working age of 16. About 60 per cent combined work and school, while 30 per cent had dropped out of school because of costs and lack of interest (Harmonic Society, 2007). Post-primary dropout rates are high, especially among poor students (USDoS, 25 February 2009).

Health of IDPs and returnees

Primary health care is free of charge and people are free to choose their provider. However, officials often require overt or concealed payment for services and medicines (USDoS, 25 February 2009). These payments can comprise two thirds of total health care costs and some may not receive the treatment they require as a result (Oxfam, 2004). The government has recently cracked down on this corruption and as one such measure issues expectant mothers a voucher for prenatal care and delivery (IDMC, November 2009). Despite subsidies, many poor people cannot afford drugs on the government's essential medicines list.

There is no available health information relating specifically to IDPs and returnees. Most IDPs and returnees report having a health post in their village, but larger "polyclinics" are usually over 20 kilometres away (IDMC, November 2009). The already low uptake of primary health care services fell substantially after independence and is now well below levels in the European Union (WHO, 2009). This is despite a state-funded programme to ensure

vulnerable groups have priority access to public health services. Cost and poor quality of care are the main reasons for low usage (NHDS, 2003).

The government estimated that 62 medical clinics were damaged in border regions during the conflict (UNCHR, 6 November 2000). A 1999 IOM study of the border provinces showed that 60 per cent of researched villages had medical offices, but that only 20 per cent were fully staffed. While village health posts now have nurses, some have no water supplies and many nurses lack updated skills (IDMC, November 2009). The number of nurses has decreased since independence and is now substantially below that in other ex-Soviet states and the European Union (WHO, 2009). There is insufficient emphasis on preventive care, reproductive health and gender-based violence (IDMC, November 2009). The number of dentists has remained nearly unchanged since independence but there has been a sharp decline in the number of pharmacists. Health professionals lack prestige and are poorly paid.

Community health insurance schemes established by Oxfam have increased the access of vulnerable groups in selected areas to appropriate health care services. Households pay a quarterly insurance premium, which entitles them to basic drugs and services offered at health posts. The programme has helped rehabilitate health posts, provide them with drugs and equipment and improve training of nurses. The schemes are now important providers of health care in rural communities, ensuring that vulnerable populations of women, older persons and the poor have equal access to services (Polonsky et al., 22 February 2009).

Government response remains limited

While the Armenian government has called conflict-induced IDPs “the forsaken people” their plight has been overshadowed by the needs of

the greater number of refugees from Azerbaijan and earthquake-induced IDPs. Government support to this group has been and remains limited, and most assistance has come through generalised poverty alleviation and welfare programmes, which do not acknowledge internal displacement among entitlement criteria.

There has been no specific national or international focus on IDPs and little information on their numbers, whereabouts and needs (UNCHR, 6 November 2000). The 2000 visit of Francis Deng, the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons (the RSG), prompted the government to pay greater attention to conflict-induced IDPs, but this happened over a decade after their displacement and has not resulted in any significant improvement in their situation. The ongoing lack of official acknowledgement that displacement has contributed to IDPs’ special circumstances is reflected in the lack of prioritization of initiatives to help them achieve durable solutions and that IDPs have not been consulted regarding decisions that affect them.

Unlike other governments in the region, Armenia has not adopted a national legal framework to uphold the rights of conflict-induced IDPs. The Law on Protection of Population in Emergency Situations covers only natural or human-made disasters and excludes displacement as a result of conflict, human rights violations and generalised violence. The government views conflict-induced IDPs as normal citizens who enjoy the same constitutionally-guaranteed rights as other Armenians. The national human rights institution has also not taken an interest in addressing internal displacement.

Nevertheless, the government has taken some relevant measures. The State Migration Service in the Ministry of Territorial Administration became the national focal point for all those affected by forced displacement in 2010. Its predecessors,

the Department of Migration and Refugees and later the State Migration Agency, first collected data on the number and conditions of IDPs only ten years after their displacement and then only due to encouragement and funding from abroad. The government translated the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into Armenian with the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), but agency staff have not been trained on the rights of IDPs.

Following the RSG's visit in 2000, the government proposed several programmes to help conflict-induced IDPs and others in return areas, but none has been implemented due to financial constraints. The most recent, outlined in 2008, aimed to help 626 internally displaced families return to their homes, to integrate returnees and conflict-affected households and to rebuild infrastructure in return areas (Government of Armenia, 25 September 2008). Foreign donors have been reluctant to contribute to these programmes in the absence of resources allocated by the government.

However, in some border communities the government has improved access to drinking water, renovated houses and repaired irrigation systems. Some IDPs living in temporary shelters have been included in a scheme to offer residential land title there (Government of Armenia, 5 November 2004).

International response

The international response to conflict-induced displacement in Armenia has been piecemeal. The main engaged international organisations have been NRC, the Danish Refugee Council and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Given the protracted nature of the conflict, many donors and organisations have long shifted their attention elsewhere and no longer assist conflict-induced IDPs. However, some earthquake-displaced IDPs still receive assistance from the International

Committee of the Red Cross (IDMC, November 2009). Currently Armenia's main donors are France, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the European Commission. The World Bank has also provided significant aid. This external support has not specifically targeted them, but IDPs and returnees have benefited from the funding of health, education, water, agriculture and energy programmes.

A project entitled Sustainable Livelihoods for Socially Vulnerable Refugees, Internally Displaced and Local Families in Armenia is being implemented by UNHCR, UNDP, the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Children's Agency (UNICEF). Its goals are to reduce poverty, improve access to services, help vulnerable groups develop sustainable livelihoods and build the capacity of beneficiaries and government officials. The project has provisions to include a small number of vulnerable IDP families with units in a building being converted into social housing. This will be similar to long-completed social housing projects facilitated by UNHCR and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for refugees from Azerbaijan and for other vulnerable groups.

European institutions have promoted the rights of IDPs and pushed for settlement of the conflict with Azerbaijan. The Council of Europe has deplored ceasefire violations (CoE, 13 April 2006) and urged the government to push for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (CoE, 23 January 2007; CoE, 13 April 2006), to become a member of the Council of Europe Development Bank (which could open new funding channels for IDP-related programmes) (CoE, 8 June 2009) and to pay special attention to the needs of displaced women (CoE, 16 March 2007). Following his mission to Armenia in 2007, the Council's Commissioner for Human Rights called on the government to ensure that all refugees and IDPs who fled as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are adequately housed (CoE, 30 April 2008).

The EU's European Neighbourhood Plan calls on Armenia to commit to a peaceful resolution of conflict, to provide assistance to IDPs, to encourage people-to-people contacts and to promote the active involvement of civil society. Analysts have suggested, however, that the EU should take a firmer approach to promoting resolution of the conflict (IChD, September 2009). The EU has put only limited pressure on the Armenian government to forge people-to-people contacts and engage civil society. However, in recent years the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus has become more active, for instance by presenting confidence-building measures. The EU should now enhance the mandate to enable the Special Representative to visit Nagorno-Karabakh.

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Armenia. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

Contact:

Nina M. Birkeland

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy

Tel.: +41 (0)22 795 07 34

Email: nina.birkeland@nrc.ch

Nadine Walicki

Country Analyst

Email: nadine.walicki@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701