



## **"Women in Politics, Public Administration and Civil Society" program**

### **POLICY BRIEF**

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**YEREVAN, 2023**

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AMD	Armenian Dram
CSO	Civil Society Organization
LSGB	Local Self-Government Body
NKR	Nagorno Karabakh Republic
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RA	Republic of Armenia
RA MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
RA MLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
RA MTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia
RF	Russian Federation
SEN	Special educational needs
USS	Unified Social Service

## PROBLEM BACKGROUND

Azerbaijan's invasion of NKR that started on September 27 of 2020 lasted for 44 days. During that war Azerbaijan annexed a range of NKR territories. According to the November 9 Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan gained control of the city of Shushi, Agdam, Berdzor and Karvachar regions<sup>1</sup>. 80% of the 90,000 people that arrived in Armenia due to the 2020 military operation were women and children<sup>2</sup>. After the end of the war, the majority of refugees returned to NKR, while some of them remained in Armenia; the people of the annexed regions of NKR moved to other communities of NKR.

On December 12 of 2022, Azerbaijan started the blockade of the area that remained under NKR control, blocking the Shushi-Qarin Tak section of the only road connecting RA to NKR, which was part of the area under the responsibility of the RF peacekeeping forces<sup>3</sup>. During the 9-month-long blockade, Azerbaijan regularly disrupted the supply of gas, electricity, and water, communications were disrupted as well. For the duration of these 9 months, the people of the NKR suffered famine, a lack of medical and first aid supplies, insufficient living conditions, terror and oppression.

In 2023, on the 19th of September, Azerbaijan embarked on a new, full-scale offensive against the NKR. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, the first refugee group consisting of 40 people arrived in Kornidzor<sup>4</sup>. According to the latest information, the RA received 101,848 refugees from the NKR<sup>5</sup>. According to the information provided by the RA MTAI, 76,692 people were in different marzes of Armenia by the 7<sup>th</sup> of October. The distribution by marz is as follows: Aragatsotn - 4,109, Ararat - 18,367, Armavir - 8,144, Gegharkunik - 4,895, Lori - 4,541, Kotayk - 22,150, Shirak -

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<sup>1</sup> Ալիևլի, Փաշինյանի և Պուտինի հայտարարության 9 կետերը, Mediamax, նոյեմբերի 10, 2020 (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://mediamax.am/am/news/region/40789/>):

<sup>2</sup> Կին ակտիվիստների եվ քաղաքացիական հասարակության կազմակերպությունների ձայները. նրանք Հայաստանում փախստականների ճգնաժամին առաջին արձագանքողներից են, ՄՄԿ կանայք, 2023:

<sup>3</sup> Isayev H., Shahverdyan L., Azerbaijanis again block the road to Karabagh, 12 December, 2022, Eurasianet (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://eurasianet.org/azerbajanis-again-block-the-road-to-karabakh>):

<sup>4</sup> Արցախցիների առաջին խումբը հասավ Կոռնիձոր, CIVILNET, 24 սեպտեմբեր, 2023 (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://www.civilnet.am/news/751873/>):

<sup>5</sup> ԼՂ-ից բռնի տեղահանվածներին հավելյալ 50000 դրամ կտրամադրվի, բայց կլինեն բացառություններ, Սպուտնիկ Արմենիա, 23.10.2023 (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://armeniasputnik.am/20231023/lghic-brni-teghahanvatsnerin-haveljal-50000-dram-ktramadrvi-bajc-klinen-bacarutjunner-67594146.html>):

2,168, Syunik - 5,438, Vayots Dzor - 2,303, Tavush - 3,189 persons<sup>6</sup>. As of the data published by UN Women gender alert I 27% of NK refugees are accommodated in Yerevan, and 73% in other regions of Armenia<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, the flow of people from community to community within Armenia is a continuous process, people relocate looking for more comfortable or affordable accommodation, employment, or they relocate closer to their relatives.

52% of the NK refugees are women, 31% are children and 18% are the elderly<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> ԼՂ-ից բռնի տեղահանված 100 632 անձից 99,3 տոկոսի տվյալները մշակված են. Նազելի Բաղդասարյան, Առաջին լրատվական ալիք, 7 հոկտեմբերի, 2023 (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://www.1lurer.am/hy/2023/10/07/>):

<sup>7</sup> Կին ակտիվիստների և քաղաքացիական հասարակության կազմակերպությունների ձայները. նրանք Հայաստանում փախստականների ճգնաժամին առաջին արձագանքողներից են, ՄԱԿ կանայք, 2023:

<sup>8</sup> Կին ակտիվիստների և քաղաքացիական հասարակության կազմակերպությունների ձայները. նրանք Հայաստանում փախստականների ճգնաժամին առաջին արձագանքողներից են, ՄԱԿ կանայք, 2023:

## SUPPORT MEASURES FOR NK REFUGEES

After the 44-day war, the Government of the RA adopted the following support measures:

1. One-time financial support equal to the minimum monthly salary of Armenia (68,000 AMD),
2. 15,000 AMD support for residence to those who don't (even partially) own real estate in the RA,
3. One-time financial support of 300,000 AMD to NKR citizens who are accomodating in RA or NKR and are registered in regions that Azerbaijan gained control of as a result of the 2020 September 27 Azerbaijani offensive.
4. Expense reimbursement measure for temporary hosts of adults registered in regions of NKR that are no longer under NKR control: 30,000 AMD per person to hosts in RA, 45,000 AMD per person to hosts in NKR.
5. 1-5 milion AMD social assistance to the families of civilian victims and persons disabled as a result of war operations.
6. Reimbursement of damages caused by Azerbaijan's shelling of RA citizens' property.
7. 100% compensation of first semester tuition fee for the 2020-2021 educational year to the participants of military actions during the war, as well as to their children and spouses.
8. One-time financial support of 250,000 AMD for each member of the family that lost residential real estate registered in NKR due to damage sustained during the Azerbaijani offensive started on September 27, 2020 or other reasons.
9. Monthly financial support of 300,000 AMD for up to 6 months to the families of military servants who went missing in action as a result of the 2020 September 27 Azerbaijani offensive<sup>9</sup>.

The government of RA introduced the following support measures for NK refugees who arrived in Armenia after the Azerbaijani offensive on the NKR on September 19, 2023 and were registered by RA MIA migration and citizenship service<sup>10</sup>:

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<sup>9</sup> Աջակցության միջոցառումներ, ՀՀ կառավարություն (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://www.gov.am/am/support-measures/>):

<sup>10</sup> ՀՀ ԱՍՀՆ ֆեյսբուքյան պաշտոնական կայքէջ (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://www.facebook.com/mlsa.am/>):

1. The government of the RA catalogued accommodations for 40,000 people in different communities of RA. These include dormitories, vacation homes, empty homes, etc.
2. One-time financial support of 100,000 AMD to refugees.
3. Accommodation and utility expense support of 40+10 thousand AMD to refugees from the NKR for the duration of 6 months, starting November.
4. Two monthly financial support packages of 50,000 AMD for refugees from Nagorno Karabakh.
5. According to a statement made on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, the RA government granted a temporary protection status to refugees from the NKR, helping expedite the procedure of giving them RA citizenship.
6. NK refugees who were beneficiaries of pensions and/or subsidies in the NKR would get their social guarantees according to RA law<sup>11</sup>. The process has not yet started at the time this policy brief was prepared.
7. 2384 NK refugees signed employment contracts in the RA, 3490 were registered as jobseekers by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs<sup>12</sup>.
8. The Prime Minister of the RA stated that the discussion of long-term housing support for NK refugees will be initiated in the coming days, which will be maximally accompanied by the similar programs for RA citizens<sup>13</sup>.

Apart from measures taken by the RA Government, humanitarian aid to NK refugees was also provided by various LSGBs, CSOs, and volunteers. The humanitarian aid included:

1. Food packages
2. Hygiene products
3. Clothing
4. Bedding products
5. Household appliances

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<sup>11</sup> ՀՀ-ում կենսաթոշակներն ու նպաստներն ավելի ցածր են, քան եղել են Արցախում:

<sup>12</sup> ԱՍՀ նախարարի տեղակալ Ռ. Սարգսյան, մամուլի ասուլիս, ՀՀ ԱՍՀՆ ֆեյսբուքյան պաշտոնական կայքէջ (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://www.facebook.com/mlsa.am>):

<sup>13</sup> ԼՂ-ից բռնի տեղահանվածներին հավելյալ 50000 դրամ կտրամադրվի, բայց կլինեն բացառություններ, Սպուտնիկ Արմենիա, 23.10.2023 (Աղբյուրը՝ <https://armeniasputnik.am/20231023/lghic-brni-teghahanvatsnerin-haveljal-50000-dram-ktramadrvi-bajc-klinen-bacarutjunner-67594146.html>):

The LSGBs were also included together with state institutions in the processes of registration of NK refugees, need assessment, and targeted support provision.

International and domestic CSOs reviewed the programs implemented by them and redirected resources toward short-term support for NK refugees, as well as the development of medium-term and long-term integration programs.

## PROBLEMS OF NK REFUGEES

The influx of NK refugees to the RA caused many domestic and international organizations, including the OxYGen foundation to refocus their attention and program potential toward the development of long-term support programs for NK refugees. The OxYGen foundation turned its attention to the issue of the social integration of the refugees and initiated the process of raising these issues, validating them, and conducted a series of meetings aimed at determining priorities. The purpose of the meetings was:

- to identify/evaluate the needs and perspectives of the inclusion and social integration of NK refugees, particularly women, taking into account the impact of the war,
- study the challenges and perspectives of inclusion of NK refugees in hosting communities,
- analyze policies and practices that hinder or promote social inclusion,
- catalogue local challenges, solutions, recommendations to create a strategic roadmap for social inclusion and social cohesion to raise them to the national level and/or disseminate them at the local level.

In October-November of 2023, meetings were held with Women Taskforce, discussions with persons of concern (NK refugees) were organized, as well as discussions with CSOs, local authorities and the experts and (*See Table 1.*).

**Table 1.** The activities carried out by the OxYGen Foundation to identify the issues of social inclusion of NK refugees in Armenia and setting priorities.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>19.10.2023</b>	Women Taskforce	Online	Brainstorming	Issues raised
<b>23.10.2023</b>	NK refugees accommodated in Charentsavan community	Offline	Discussion of the key issues	Issues raised
<b>30.10.2023</b>	Regional meeting with representatives of regional governorates, heads of RA communities, administrative heads	Online	Validation of key issues	Validation of key issues
<b>10.11.2023</b>	Meeting with CSOs and experts	Online	Setting priorities	Determining the priorities

The meetings with NK refugees, Women Taskforce, LSGBs and CSO representatives gave an opportunity to highlight the following problems of NK refugees and prioritize them:

1. Accommodation problems:
  - 1.1. Insufficient number of accommodations,



- 1.2. Inadequate housing conditions, housing in need of repair,
- 1.3. Sharp rise in house rent prices,
- 1.4. The owners of empty houses refuse to hand over the apartments, fearing that rent will not be paid or that the NK refugees will not vacate the house if necessary.
- 1.5. NK refugees are still unsure which community they will live in, causing large volumes of movement from community to community.
2. Need for material support.
  - 2.1. Need for food,
  - 2.2. Need for hygiene products,
  - 2.3. Need for bedding products,
  - 2.4. Need for household appliances,
  - 2.5. Need for special assistive devices for people with disabilities.
3. Employment issues. Salary offered by Armenian employers is less than expected by NK refugees,
  - 3.2. NK refugees do not want to pursue employment until they decide where to live,
  - 3.3. Land is privatized in the RA, including agricultural land,
  - 3.4. Finding jobs in their own professions is often problematic, there is a need to acquire a new profession.
4. Children's education problems:
  - 4.1. Kindergartens are licensed and do not have the legal ability to accommodate more children than specified in the license. As a result, many children from NK do not attend kindergarten,
  - 4.2. Since 2020, the education of NK children has been hindered due to COVID-19, war, blockade, famine and malnutrition. As a result, many have fallen behind in the school curriculum,
  - 4.3. NK children speak a unique Armenian dialect, which is substantially different from the dialects in other regions of the RA. This often becomes an obstacle to integration into the school community and can become a reason for bullying,
  - 4.4. NK children also have difficulty adjusting to new schools due to PTSD: they have intense feelings of disappointment and fear, there is a difficult atmosphere in the family, they refuse to go to school, etc.,

4.5. Some children do not understand teachers due to dialect differences, worsening their grades,

4.6. Discriminatory treatment from teachers, other children and their parents.

5. Lack of care for single elderly people.
6. Working with local residents to develop non-discriminatory attitudes.
7. Lack of clarity and predictability, in terms of criteria for choosing a place of residence, employment, and access to various social systems.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIAL INCLUSION OF NK REFUGEES IN RA**

1. Develop long-term housing security programs for NK refugees:
  - 1.1. Build structurally light houses in various districts of RA communities to let NK refugees to live in the same districts with the locals,
  - 1.2. Provide long-term interest-free loans for families living in the bordering regions of RA, with the possibility of income tax refunds,
  - 1.3. Develop a 1-year house rent refund program for NK refugees, who are not able to purchase housing, where 50% of their rent price will be refunded in case it doesn't exceed 100,000 AMD,
  - 1.4. Develop a 1-year utility (water, electricity, gas) expense refund programs for the representatives of the most vulnerable groups of NK refugees,
  - 1.5. Establish a compensation of 50% of utility bills for local families hosting families from the NK or the possibility of refunding income tax for the same amount for a period of one year.
2. Develop employment programs for NK refugees, which will provide preparatory vocational training and education. Specifically:
  - 2.1. Training in craft professions with the possibility of employment in the future for women aged 18-35 who lack higher education,
  - 2.2. Training in the fields of innovative agriculture, information technology, socio-psychological support, service and communication for persons aged 18-35,
3. Develop programs for NK refugees to be included in small-scale and medium-scale business activities. Specifically, loans, low interest business loans and agricultural loans.
4. Train school teachers on the following topics:
  - Equal rights and inclusion: emphasize the importance of non-discriminatory treatment to every child, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, origin, etc.,
  - PTSD: main manifestations in different age groups of children, first response techniques and diagnosis of the need to refer to a psychologist,
  - Integration of immigrant children in the educational system,
  - Study the experience of educators who worked with Syrian-Armenian refugee children in Armenia due to the war in Syria, and organize an exchange of experience with educators currently working with refugee children from NK.

- To plan additional classes for NK children in public schools in order to fill educational gaps.
5. Expand home care programs for single elderly people and people with disabilities, including both NK refugees and locals.
  6. Develop awareness campaigns, awareness materials (videos, infographics, games) aimed at forming and strengthening a non-discriminatory attitude of local residents towards NK refugees, applying the behavior change communication (BCC) methodology. Regularly circulate these materials through mass media. The grant programs of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport can be considered as a possible source of funding.
  7. Initiate the development of social integration guides for immigrants, which will include accessible visual solutions for persons with SEN: infographics, lists and contact information of organizations and professionals dealing with immigrant issues. They should contain the following sections:
    - Housing programs, affordable housing,
    - Armenian language and cultural integration,
    - Domestic integration in the given settlement,
    - Educational integration,
    - Integration into the labor market,
    - Social services,
    - Psychological support,
    - About the refugee status, social protection, rights and responsibilities,
    - Disseminate the developed guidelines through available channels: mass media, social networks, distribution of leaflets and booklets. Ensure the availability of printed versions in the municipalities. Place electronic versions on the websites of municipalities and relevant departments.
  8. To form and integrate a team of operators responding to the needs of NK refugees into the MLSA hotline. It is meant to provide targeted aid distribution, ongoing needs assessment and telephone psychological support.

**This policy brief has been prepared based on an analysis of the results of the research carried out in Armenia over the recent years and reflects the viewpoints of the project's experts, as well as of participants in policy dialogue events held in Yerevan and the RA marzes.**

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