



Azerbaijan



Almost 590,000 people were internally displaced in Azerbaijan at the end of 2009, some 20 years after the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents met repeatedly during 2009 for negotiations to resolve the conflict under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group, but a peace agreement still appeared distant. Meanwhile, the 1994 ceasefire remained fragile as both sides continued to increase their defence budgets and skirmishes continued.

The government continued to improve housing conditions for IDPs in 2009, and some 1,400 families were resettled to new villages and apartment buildings. While this was a positive initiative, resettled IDPs reported that they did not participate in the planning process, the houses of vulnerable groups were not adapted to their needs, and new villages were far from jobs and services and sometimes close to the line of contact. IDPs' tenure of this accommodation was insecure, a problem which also affected IDPs in all other types of accommodation.

The majority of IDPs, however, still lived in dire conditions in various types of housing, including collective centres, mud shacks, abandoned apartments, informal settlements and in the overcrowded homes of relatives. In 2009, an increasing number of owners sought to evict IDPs from their property through the courts, and in these cases, the courts increasingly referred to a 2007 decision of the European Court of Human Rights upholding the right of an owner to repossess property occupied by IDPs. Usually the IDPs were not offered either adequate alternative accommodation or compensation.

IDPs still struggle to earn a stable income. In rural areas, few IDPs are employed or have the land, livestock and assets to engage in profitable agriculture. With no investment in rural areas, home gardens have become their main source of food and they continue to depend on government assistance and remittances from relatives. IDPs seem to find jobs more easily in cities, but mainly in the low-paying informal market.

Many IDPs who moved to the capital Baku have been unable to register their new residence, due to bureaucratic processes, demands for unofficial payments and because of the government's policy to limit migration to the city. Without residence registration, IDPs have been unable to access formal employment or government assistance, health care services, education or pensions. As a result, families have been separated, with one member moving to Baku for work while the rest of the family stays behind to receive entitlements. IDPs have

also had difficulties in buying property due to their temporary residence status, in receiving their due pension after losing their work book during displacement, and in standing for election to public roles at their current place of residence.

The Ministry of Education was in 2009 undertaking a study on the quality and level of education of internally displaced children. Approximately 60 per cent of IDP children are taught separately from local children, but parents can send their children to mixed classes. Schools reportedly need renovations and additional qualified teachers, especially in rural areas. Parents cannot always afford transport, clothing and supplies for their children, which has limited their attendance, as has early marriage of girls and labour migration of families. IDPs consider they cannot afford higher education despite their entitlement to tuition fee waivers.

IDPs' health appears to still be affected by their displacement. A 2009 study found that the majority of IDPs suffered from mental health problems, and that their children had been traumatised by the displacement, despite not having directly experienced military operations themselves. Most of these IDPs had not applied for mental health care services because they were not aware of them or feared being stigmatised, because they could not afford them, or because the services and qualified personnel were lacking. Some health services and medicines are free for IDPs, but information on their entitlements is not easily accessible and, like other citizens, they have to pay some official fees and also make unofficial payments.

The government continues to favour the return of IDPs over other settlement options. An improved national response would entail efforts to involve IDPs in decisions that affect them, acknowledgement of their right to freely choose between returning and settling elsewhere, and measures to make IDPs more self-reliant at their current residence.

In 2009, three UN treaty body committees made recommendations to the government on IDPs. These included ensuring equal opportunities, simplifying the address registration procedure, continuing to improve access of women and girls to education, employment, health and housing and ensuring consultation during rehabilitation of collective centres. UN member states also made recommendations to the government on IDPs during the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan early in the year.