ARMENIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE INTERNATIONAL

BRIEF

Humanitarian Consequences of the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) Displacement

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B R I E F

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Background

Three years after the complete ethnic cleansing and forced depopulation of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in September 2023, the displaced population continues to endure profound, unaddressed humanitarian, legal, and human rights consequences. What unfolded following Azerbaijan's large-scale military aggression on September 19, 2023—subjugating a besieged population after ten months of total blockade—was not merely an acute humanitarian emergency, but an enduring tragedy marked by systemic impunity, severe loss of life, and the fracturing of an entire society.

The military operations resulted in substantial casualties: official records document 265 servicemen and 21 civilians killed, with 14 individuals still unaccounted for. Compounding the catastrophe, a devastating explosion at a fuel depot near Stepanakert amidst the panicked exodus claimed at least 218 lives, leaving 21 people missing. Furthermore, at least 64 elderly and vulnerable individuals perished during the grueling evacuation along the Lachin Corridor due to exhaustion, lack of medical attention, and extreme conditions.

Three years into the displacement, as of 2026, no clear or effective mechanism has been

established by Armenia, Azerbaijan, or the international community to enable families of the missing to search for and ascertain the fate of their loved ones. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), approximately 429 Armenians remain registered as missing persons from the conflict escalations between 2020 and 2023. While the political leadership of both sides persistently professes commitment to a "peace agenda," this vital, time-sensitive humanitarian imperative has been largely sidelined and omitted from meaningful diplomatic engagement.

Equally alarming is the ongoing illegal detention of 20 Armenian hostages, prisoners of war, and civilian and military leaders held in Azerbaijani captivity in Baku. Defying international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights norms, Azerbaijan continues to stage sham trials, handing down arbitrary, unlawful sentences against these detainees. Despite the clear criminality of these actions, there remains an acute absence of resolute, tangible intervention and pressure from the international community to halt these violations and secure their immediate, unconditional release.

Compounding the collective grief, thousands of displaced families repeatedly raise the urgent humanitarian demand to visit the graves of their relatives in Artsakh, arrange exhumations and repatriations of remains, or access their ancestral spiritual and cultural monuments. Despite the deep humanitarian and dignity-centered nature of these appeals, this issue has likewise been neglected and entirely absent from the agenda of Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations, leaving the population cut off from their family gravesites and heritage.

Socio-Economic Situation:

The socio-economic conditions of forcibly displaced persons granted temporary protection status in the Republic of Armenia remain precarious. While initial emergency interventions successfully prevented acute shelter collapse, transitioning to durable economic self-sufficiency has faced systemic bottlenecks, policy gaps, and escalating living costs.

1. The transitional living and rental compensation program (initially 40,000 AMD for rent + 10,000 AMD for utilities per person per month) provided vital relief throughout 2024. However, the government progressively scaled down this support, strictly narrowing eligibility to more vulnerable categories (retirees aged 63 and older, individuals with Group I and II disabilities, and families who lost breadwinners) and reducing allocations to 40,000 AMD and subsequently 30,000 AMD. Universal cash assistance for working-age adults was terminated entirely. In the face of persistently surging rental prices across Armenia, the termination of this assistance has led to increasingly frequent, documented cases of displaced families being rendered completely homeless, with nowhere to turn. While acute crises are occasionally mitigated through ad-hoc interventions by local charitable initiatives or individual donors, there is a glaring absence of a predictable, state-led safety net to prevent eviction and direct homelessness.
2. In mid-2024, the Armenian government rolled out a state housing provision program offering certificates ranging from 2 million to 5 million AMD per family member, scaled by location. However, three years after the forced displacement, out of approximately 25,000 displaced families in need of shelter, only around 4,000 families have managed to secure housing under this state program. This critically low uptake clearly demonstrates that the state must

introduce serious, fundamental reforms and improvements to make the program truly realistic and accessible for the displaced population. Key impediments include:

- *Widening Disparity Between Certificates and Property Prices:* The financial assistance offered through state certificates has failed to keep pace with the continuous, rapid rise of real estate prices in Armenia. As property values escalate daily, purchasing an adequate home solely with these vouchers has become virtually impossible. This gap is particularly catastrophic for small families (1–2 members), whose cumulative voucher entitlement is fundamentally insufficient to access the housing market. Despite repeated appeals by civil society and advocacy bodies highlighting this arithmetic shortfall, the government has yet to offer adequate policy revisions or realistic supplementary financing options.
- *Protracted Citizenship Processing and Bureaucratic Delays:* Acceptance into the housing purchase program is strictly conditioned on obtaining citizenship of the Republic of Armenia. While lingering concerns remain regarding how naturalization might affect claims to abandoned property in Artsakh or prejudice against the collective right of return, the primary operational bottleneck has shifted to bureaucratic failure: the naturalization process routinely exceeds the legally established timeframes. Prolonged administrative delays and burdensome paperwork leave applicants trapped in administrative limbo, unable to access housing assistance within reasonable timeframes.
- *Absence of Compact Settlement Frameworks:* The program relies on individual open-market vouchers rather than organized, compact community settlements. This dispersed approach fragments close-knit displaced communities, weakening informal social safety nets, communal leadership, and the preservation of Artsakh's distinct cultural identity.

3. In the immediate aftermath of the 2023 displacement, a wide array of international humanitarian organizations mobilized emergency cash-based transfers and targeted food parcels. Three years on, however, these essential support pipelines have effectively disappeared. This cessation is not the result of diminished vulnerability, but rather of donor fatigue and a failure by the international community to mobilize supplementary resources for this ongoing crisis. Stripped of rental assistance and without active food aid programs, dozens of marginalized households now face acute food insecurity, forced to restrict basic nutrition and skip meals to survive.

Employment:

Labor integration remains one of the steepest systemic challenges facing the displaced population:

1. Three years after the forced displacement, poverty levels among Artsakh Armenians remain critically high. This widespread destitution is directly driven by the fact that thousands of displaced individuals cannot secure employment corresponding to their professional qualifications and expertise. According to official data, only around 25,000 displaced persons have registered formal employment in Armenia—representing barely one-fourth (approx. 25%) of the working-age displaced population. The remaining majority are either

trapped in protracted unemployment or compelled to take up precarious, low-wage, unskilled manual jobs far below their educational qualifications merely to ensure basic day-to-day survival for their families.

2. The economic marginalization of the displaced is further evidenced by a dramatic income gap: the average monthly salary among employed displaced persons stands at approximately 150,000 AMD, which is half the national average salary in Armenia (approx. 300,000 AMD). Furthermore, over 40% of employed displaced workers report being substantially overqualified for their positions, with this mismatch surging past 55% among women. The displaced workforce is disproportionately concentrated in low-paid service sectors, informal construction, agriculture, and seasonal manual labor.
3. Existing state-sponsored employment promotion initiatives are severely constrained in scope and remain inaccessible to the vast majority. Underscoring their limited reach, official statistics show that throughout the implementation of state employment support schemes, only around 3,000 displaced individuals have managed to secure work through these specific mechanisms. These programs suffer from short funding windows (such as temporary three-month wage subsidies), offering little long-term job retention once state co-financing expires.
4. Targeted economic empowerment and entrepreneurship programs designed to help displaced individuals launch their own small businesses or achieve sustainable self-employment are entirely absent at the state level. While diaspora organizations, international humanitarian agencies, and local NGOs have initiated localized micro-grant and business startup schemes, these interventions are severely limited in scale, reach, and financial volume. Therefore, despite their positive localized intent, they remain fundamentally incapable of driving systemic, structural change or securing widespread economic self-sufficiency across the broader displaced community.
5. There is an acute deficit of state and donor-funded vocational retraining and upskilling programs tailored to help displaced professionals adapt to the dynamics of the local labor market. Specialized interventions are urgently required to expand re-qualification opportunities, allowing former public servants, educators, and technicians to realign their expertise with market demands.
6. The livelihood crisis is particularly acute in rural settlements and regions situated far from Yerevan. In these peripheral and remote communities, where economic activity is sluggish and local employment opportunities are virtually nonexistent, displaced families face near-total economic exclusion and dependency, with minimal access to viable labor markets or alternative income-generating initiatives.
7. A significant proportion of the adult displaced population previously held positions in municipal administration, civil service, law enforcement, or public sector agencies in Nagorno-Karabakh—backgrounds that do not readily map onto private-sector requirements in Armenia. Additionally, persistent administrative bottlenecks, license validation hurdles, and credential recognition constraints continue to impede specialized professionals, such as healthcare workers and teachers, from securing commensurate career placement.

Healthcare:

The long-term physical and psychological footprint of the 10-month blockade of the

Lachin Corridor, the September 2023 military aggression, and subsequent forced displacement remain severe and pronounced. The enduring trauma of displacement, compounded by prolonged malnutrition and severe deprivation, has created compounding, long-term health risks across all age groups that demand systemic, continuous medical screening and proactive interventions.

1. The healthcare sector remains one of the comparatively best-integrated areas of state support. The Government of Armenia continues to provide state-guaranteed basic healthcare services and specialized medical care free of charge under state-order packages for displaced persons. Furthermore, with the rollout and enactment of Armenia's Comprehensive Health Insurance system in 2026, displaced Artsakh Armenians who meet the established eligibility criteria are formally integrated into the national insurance framework, providing broader access to essential diagnostic and clinical care.
2. Despite the formal provision of state-guaranteed free medical services, a major systemic vulnerability lies in budgetary limitations. Due to insufficient public funding and rigid annual budgetary quotas, hospitals and medical centers routinely exhaust their allocated state-order funds toward the final months of each year. As a result, critical free diagnostic procedures, surgeries, and specialized treatments frequently become unavailable or are indefinitely deferred late in the year, leaving displaced patients who cannot afford out-of-pocket commercial rates without essential care.
3. Significant structural and geographic inequalities compound these delivery gaps. The most acute challenges are concentrated in rural, remote, and border communities, where specialized diagnostic facilities, modern medical infrastructure, and certified healthcare specialists are severely lacking. Displaced families residing in peripheral areas incur prohibitive transportation expenses merely to access regional clinics. Additionally, there is a persistent lack of systematic public information and outreach: many displaced households remain unaware of their specific legal entitlements, eligible free healthcare packages, referral pathways, and subsidized pharmaceutical options.
4. Widespread post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic depression, severe anxiety, and persistent bereavement remain pervasive across the displaced community. While primary polyclinics and localized civil society programs have introduced counseling services, these initiatives remain fragmented and largely clustered in Yerevan and major cities. Given the extreme, cumulative psychological vulnerability of this population, mental health and psychosocial support programs must be substantially expanded, institutionalized at the community and school levels, and made widely accessible in rural settlements.
5. Unmanaged chronic conditions—most notably cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes—are highly prevalent, frequently exacerbated by sustained psychological stress and disrupted living arrangements. Because the prolonged blockade and traumatic displacement created permanent physiological vulnerabilities, systematic, recurring screening programs are vital to prevent premature mortality and detect emerging chronic pathologies at early stages.
6. Pediatric anemia, stunted growth indicators, and nutritional deficiencies stemming from the ten months of severe deprivation during the blockade continue to require targeted clinical monitoring. Concurrently, elevated rates of high-risk pregnancies, miscarriages, and

postpartum stress-induced disorders persist among displaced women, driven by socio-economic insecurity, inadequate living environments, and lingering emotional trauma.

Education:

While Armenia's integration of displaced children into primary and secondary public schools has been one of the comparatively structured elements of the emergency response—facilitated by common curricula and a shared language—three years into the displacement significant structural, legal, and socio-cultural barriers remain unaddressed:

1. Although official statistics record that over 80% of displaced school-age children have been enrolled in public educational institutions, this baseline obscures an alarming, hidden reality: a growing number of displaced children—particularly in remote, agricultural, and rural communities—are being forced out of the educational system entirely. Driven by extreme household poverty, the termination of basic cash assistance, and lack of stable adult employment, these children are compelled to abandon their education to work in agriculture or informal labor to relieve their families' financial burden and secure basic sustenance.
2. While the government instituted tuition assistance and scholarship mechanisms for displaced university students, this support is arbitrarily and strictly confined to state (public) universities. This policy fosters discrimination against equally vulnerable displaced students enrolled in non-state, private accredited universities that provide high-quality education. Despite sharing the same socio-economic trauma, poverty, and displacement background, these students are entirely excluded from state tuition relief. Consequently, social media networks are inundated with distress appeals and peer-led crowdfunding campaigns by displaced private-university students desperately attempting to raise funds for tuition to prevent expulsion.
3. Severe capacity shortages persist in early childhood education. Public kindergartens in Yerevan and major regional urban centers face overwhelming waitlists and structural deficits, leaving thousands of displaced preschool-aged children without institutional access. This capacity gap not only hinders critical early childhood socialization and school readiness, but also directly paralyzes displaced mothers, preventing them from entering the workforce or participating in livelihood and reskilling initiatives.
4. A persistent legal and logistical challenge involves the formal recovery and validation of lost educational records, transcripts, certificates, and diplomas left behind or destroyed during the chaotic evacuation of Artsakh. While basic administrative pathways have been established to re-issue certain basic records, serious legislative and procedural vacuums persist. In multiple non-standard cases—particularly involving closed institutions, archived records, or professional specializations—it remains practically impossible for displaced individuals to legally re-certify their credentials, directly blocking them from continuing their education, defending degrees, or entering licensed professions.
5. Education systems have focused solely on institutional absorption while entirely omitting mechanisms for cultural preservation. Displaced Artsakh Armenians view the preservation of their distinct cultural identity, living dialect, and intangible heritage as an existential priority. Nevertheless, the state has formulated no concrete educational or community

programs, regional cultural spaces, or linguistic initiatives to safeguard the unique Artsakh dialect and cultural legacy. Introducing deliberate, institutionalized mechanisms within the educational and cultural domains is urgently needed to foster and sustain this community identity.

6. Displaced children continue to carry heavy behavioral and psychological consequences of the 2023 military offensive, months of siege, and sudden displacement. In-classroom trauma symptoms, adaptation hurdles, and peer alienation require institutionalized, permanent psycho-pedagogical support services and systematic anti-bullying frameworks across receiving schools, which currently remain under-resourced.

Recovery of Legal Documents:

Three years following the forced displacement, the restoration and verification of lost essential civil status, personal identification, and property records remain persistent, acute systemic obstacles for thousands of displaced Artsakh Armenians, severely impeding their legal security and access to fundamental rights:

1. The rapid, chaotic nature of the forced exodus in September 2023—unfolding under active military threats and following a ten-month total siege—forced tens of thousands of residents to flee with only the clothes on their backs. Consequently, an immense volume of critical original documentation was left behind, damaged, or destroyed. This includes passports, birth and marriage certificates, death records, divorce decrees, military service books, educational diplomas, and immovable property title deeds.
2. Displaced individuals routinely navigate a rigid, decentralized, and sluggish administrative bureaucracy. State agencies and municipal civil registry offices operate without a unified, flexible emergency protocol tailored to the realities of a displaced population. Instead of an agile, single-window service, applicants face fragmented administrative channels, long queues, and unreasonable evidential demands, underscoring an urgent imperative for streamlined, fast-track procedures.
3. The document restoration process imposes a severe financial strain on an already economically vulnerable population. Displaced persons are required to pay statutory state duties and administrative fees for every single duplicate, archival reference, or certified copy. These costs escalate dramatically when applicants must obtain certified notarial translations, apostilles, turning the recovery of basic legal identity into an unaffordable luxury for low-income and unemployed households.
4. Due to physical archives remaining in Artsakh or being wholly inaccessible, administrative bodies frequently issue formal refusals to establish vital legal facts through summary executive proceedings. In such recurrent cases, displaced persons have no choice but to initiate formal court proceedings to legally establish facts of birth, death, marriage, or family lineage. This judicial pathway is protracted, often dragging on for months or even years, and demands substantial financial outlays for court fees, retainers, and legal counsel that displaced families simply cannot afford.
5. Document deficits produce a destructive domino effect across all areas of integration, particularly the acquisition of Armenian citizenship. Because naturalization applications demand an exhaustive, strict portfolio of verified civil status certificates, any missing,

incomplete, or unverified document halts the entire naturalization process. This administrative paralysis directly obstructs families from qualifying for the state housing assistance program—which is conditioned on obtaining citizenship—leaving them trapped in prolonged legal uncertainty and housing destitution.

Recommendations

Based on the multi-sectoral human rights, socio-economic, and legal monitoring three years post-displacement (2026), international agencies—primarily UNHCR, relevant UN bodies, international donor partners—and the Government of the Republic of Armenia should urgently prioritize and implement the following targeted measures:

1. Unresolved Humanitarian Issues: Missing Persons, Captives, and Cultural Rights

- UNHCR, ICRC, and international partners must actively pressure and assist parties to institute a dedicated, depoliticized tracing and identification mechanism to ascertain the fate of the 429 missing Armenians from 2020–2023 and the 2023 escalation. This humanitarian priority must not remain conditioned on or sidelined by broader political negotiations.
- Mobilize urgent diplomatic, legal, and human rights pressure on Azerbaijan to cease arbitrary sham trials and immediately release all Armenian prisoners of war, civilian detainees, and former military and political leaders held illegally in Baku, ensuring full access for international monitors and the ICRC in the interim.
- Facilitate an international humanitarian mediation channel to allow displaced families to visit family gravesites in Artsakh, organize dignified exhumations and repatriations of deceased relatives' remains, and safeguard cultural and religious monuments from ongoing desecration and destruction.

2. Housing Security

- Establish a condition-linked transitional rental support mechanism. Rental assistance must continue until families have physically acquired and moved into habitable permanent homes, coupled with emergency social housing mechanisms to prevent immediate evictions and homelessness.
- Revise the financial thresholds of state housing certificates to align with the actual, inflated property market values in Armenia. Introduce dedicated supplemental weighting and progressive subsidy scales for small families (1–2 persons), for whom the current per-capita allocations are mathematically unviable.
- Eliminate the rigid prerequisite requiring displaced persons to renounce their temporary protection (refugee) status and naturalize as a condition for receiving housing assistance. Replace it with long-term, rights-preserving housing tenures that safeguard their property claims in Artsakh and their recognized right of return.
- Transition away from atomized open-market purchases toward state-backed, international donor-supported compact settlement developments. This will preserve community ties, mutual social support networks, shared heritage, and Artsakh’s distinct cultural identity, while stimulating regional economies outside the capital.

- Mobilize fresh international donor funding to address escalating food insecurity among impoverished households, providing cash transfers and nutritional aid to vulnerable families left behind by phased-out general subsidies.

3. Employment and Economic Empowerment

- Design and fund large-scale, state-administered economic empowerment schemes providing low-interest loans, seed grants, and incubation support for displaced entrepreneurs to build sustainable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and self-employment.
- Substantially scale up vocational retraining programs tailored to the Armenian labor market, focusing specifically on transitioning former public administration, municipal, and law enforcement personnel into private sector and civil service opportunities.
- Expand employer wage subsidies from the current short durations (3 months) to a minimum of 6 to 12 months, with heightened tax incentives for enterprises hiring displaced specialists in peripheral and rural regions where unemployment is most severe.
- Develop dedicated female-focused economic initiatives, including flexible employment pathways, professional upskilling, and mentorship programs to dismantle the acute overqualification and underemployment gap among displaced women.

4. Healthcare and Mental Well-Being

- Reform the financing structure of state-guaranteed healthcare packages to prevent the routine exhaustion of hospital quotas during the fourth quarter of the year. Guarantee uninterrupted access to specialized diagnostics, surgical interventions, and inpatient treatments throughout the entire calendar year.
- Ensure that eligibility assessments for Armenia's newly introduced Comprehensive Health Insurance system seamlessly incorporate all displaced persons under state-subsidized contribution schemes, eliminating out-of-pocket copayments for essential medical services.
- Deploy mobile diagnostic clinics to remote rural areas hosting displaced populations, and execute targeted public awareness campaigns to inform families of their exact medical rights, free primary and secondary healthcare entitlements, and prescription drug subsidies.
- Substantially scale and decentralize long-term psychosocial care, establishing community-based mental health hubs capable of treating chronic PTSD, anxiety, depression, and collective grief resulting from the blockade, war, and displacement.
- Roll out targeted, free screening protocols for chronic non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, hypertension) and pediatric developmental disorders/anemia to manage the lingering physical toll of the 10-month siege.

5. Education and Identity Preservation

- Amend state educational assistance programs to extend tuition subsidies, grants, and

scholarships equally to displaced students enrolled in accredited non-state (private) universities, eliminating discriminatory barriers based on university ownership type.

- Institute proactive social work and school-retention interventions to identify displaced children in rural and agricultural communities at risk of educational exclusion, providing families with targeted socio-economic support to prevent youth from dropping out to enter informal manual labor.
- Mobilize donor funding to construct, renovate, and expand public kindergartens and daycare facilities in municipalities with dense displaced populations, directly enabling mothers to seek full-time employment and professional training.
- Formulate and fund deliberate cultural-educational initiatives within formal and non-formal education frameworks dedicated to preserving Artsakh's unique dialect, folklore, crafts, and intangible cultural identity.
- Guarantee the permanent presence of certified child psychologists and social workers in schools hosting displaced pupils to mitigate adaptation difficulties, address persistent trauma symptoms, and enforce strict anti-bullying and anti-alienation policies.

6. Recovery of Lost Documents

- Establish a unified, simplified administrative procedure across all territorial registry and migration offices to replace the rigid bureaucracy currently governing the restoration of lost vital records (birth, marriage, death, military, property, and academic records).
- Legislate an absolute exemption from all statutory state fees, archive retrieval charges, notarial fees, certified translation costs, and apostille expenses required to re-issue lost civil and identity documentation.
- Introduce streamlined quasi-judicial or administrative evidentiary mechanisms (e.g., accepting reliable witness testimonies, secondary databases, digital traces, and sworn affidavits) to formally establish legal facts, sparing displaced individuals from costly, protracted civil court trials.
- Adopt flexible legislative regulations allowing the Ministry of Education to verify and re-issue lost university diplomas and academic transcripts in cases involving closed, destroyed, or inaccessible Artsakh archives, unblocking individuals from professional employment and licensing.
- Establish a dedicated rapid-clearance desk within the Migration and Citizenship Service to resolve document deficiencies promptly, ensuring that administrative backlogs do not block access to naturalization or, by extension, the state housing program.

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