

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN NAGORNO-KARABAKH BLOCKADE

KEY FIGURES

+120,000

ARMENIAN PEOPLE
ARE AFFECTED
SINCE 2022

+7,600

IDPS DISPLACED
IN 2022

NATIONAL RESPONSE CAPACITY

Artsakh and Armenian
governments

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE CAPACITY

Russian peacekeepers,
WFP, U.S. Agency for
International Development,
International Committee of
the Red Cross (ICRC),
and UN agencies

CRISIS OVERVIEW:

- Since 12 December 2022, Azerbaijani ‘eco-activists’ have blocked the Lachin corridor. They state that the main reason for the blockade is to stop the mining of gold and copper in the area (Reuters 22/12/2022; EVN Report 14/12/2022; Euractiv 28/12/2022). The Lachin corridor connects Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and is crucial for the transportation of essential goods to ethnic Armenian people residing in the region.
- Essential medicine and food are scarce because of the blockade. It is affecting over 120,000 Armenian people, including 30,000 children, 20,000 older people, and about 9,000 people with disabilities living in Nagorno-Karabakh (Arka 09/01/2023; BBC 06/01/2023; Reuters 22/12/2022).
- On 13 December 2022 and 17 January 2023, Azerbaijan cut off the gas supply to Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving the region without heat for three days in December and for several hours in January. Electricity and internet have also been disrupted (Azatutyun 17/01/2023; OCmedia 17/01/2023; (MassisPost 17/01/2023). These services are indispensable to the population’s survival, and repeated supply cuts demonstrate the ability of Azerbaijan to affect access to essential resources in the Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh (RFE/RL 17/01/2023; Eurasianet 16/12/2022; CEIP 15/12/2022).
- Nagorno-Karabakh has been a disputed area between Azerbaijan and Armenia for a long time. Between 1988–1994, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict killed more than 25,000 soldiers and civilians and displaced over one million people (HRW 01/12/1994). Between September–November 2020, an escalation of tensions between the two countries over the territory resulted in the second Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, causing the worst fighting in decades and the displacement of over 90,000 people, 88% of whom were women and children (UNSDG 19/10/2021; DW 14/07/2020). A ceasefire and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers ended the fighting. In September 2022, further hostilities between the two countries resulted in 207 dead or missing people, 7,600 IDPs displaced 7,600 people, affected 160,000 in total, and damaged over 90 buildings (IFRC 07/10/2022).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE ANALYSIS

- While the Government of Azerbaijan reports that there is no blockade and civilian cars can move freely in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian Government has issued demands for international help (Eurasianet 11/01/2023; France 24 25/12/2022). The current tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan could result in renewed hostilities and subsequent humanitarian implications similar to those in September 2020 and 2022.
- The escalation of the situation is expected to increase the displacement of ethnically Armenian people from Nagorno-Karabakh towards areas in Armenia, as has happened during previous hostilities (IFRC 07/10/2022). Because the area still has landmines from the 1988–1994 conflict and the 2020 hostilities, relocation and displacement would raise protection concerns for both ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani people (HALO accessed 11/01/2023; Al Jazeera 09/11/2021).
- Displacement and the disruption of livelihoods will result in an increased need for psychosocial support (IFRC 07/10/2022).

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- The Lachin corridor is the only land connection between Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region, but it runs across Azerbaijani territory. The Azerbaijani Government reports that the road is open for Russian peacekeepers and ICRC emergency services, but transit is still limited for trucks transporting supplies and stranded civilians trying to return to their homes (RFE/RL 10/01/2023; France 24 07/01/2023; HRW 21/12/2022).
- The ICRC has been able to pass through with a truck reported to be carrying baby food. Azerbaijani media have reported that two passenger vehicles and four trucks belonging to a Russian peacekeeping contingent have passed through, but people in Nagorno-Karabakh still report a lack of basic supplies, including essential medicine and food (APA 06/01/2023; Asbarez 26/12/2022).
- The disruptions have resulted in the death of one person who could not be transported to a medical centre, and more than a dozen people are in a critical situation (Arka 09/01/2023; The Armenian Weekly 21/12/2022).



Approximately 1,500 people, including over 200 children, are stranded because they cannot use the Lachin corridor to reach their homes, and families are divided on different sides of the blockade (WVI 13/01/2023; CFTJ 22/12/2022).

- There are information gaps regarding humanitarian needs, particularly in terms of shelter and food. No organisations have conducted humanitarian assessments, and most of the available information comes from media sources.

LESSONS LEARNT

The protection of civilians is a priority given the outcomes of past hostilities. In 2020, people who remained in Nagorno-Karabakh became vulnerable to clashes. During the confrontations, cluster bombs and shelling in civilian areas likely resulted in more casualties than were reported (DW 06/11/2020; The Daily Beast 26/10/2020).

During the hostilities in September 2022, one of the main priorities was restoring support for livelihoods so that people could meet their basic needs, particularly regarding food. The displacement of people and forced confinement during conflict disrupt income-generating activities, especially in agriculture (IFRC 07/10/2022).

It is important to strengthen the health response. In the past, increased numbers of IDPs in Armenia led to the spread of diseases, including COVID-19, monkeypox, waterborne diseases, and other vaccine-preventable diseases (IFRC 07/10/2022).

In 2020, shelter was one of the most affected sectors (Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh 01/11/2020). If the current hostilities increase in 2023, people are likely to seek refuge in nearby regions of Armenia, where they will need shelter.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Health

The lack of essential medicine places patients' lives at risk in medical centres in Nagorno-Karabakh. A children's hospital in Stepanakert, the de facto capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, is running out of lifesaving medicine, and doctors have reported serious concerns because of the lack of drugs for children suffering from epilepsy. Because of the shortages, children are given small doses of adult medicine (BBC 06/01/2023; RFE/RL 26/12/2022). The Lachin corridor is essential for transporting patients to specialised hospitals in Armenia. Armenian hospitals have suspended surgeries that had been scheduled for patients coming from

Nagorno-Karabakh. One patient who could not be transferred to a medical centre in Armenia died on 19 December 2022. As at 18 January 2023, the ICRC had helped transfer 34 patients to medical centres in Armenia (Radar 17/01/2023; News.am 18/01/2023 a). As at 16 January, 22 patients, including 13 children, were in intensive care, and five were in critical condition (1Lurer 16/01/2023). As at 18 January there was no update on the status of these patients (1Lurer 18/01/2023). As at 19 January 2023, ICRC is the main humanitarian actor able to access and transport a severely ill patient and medicine through the blocked road (EUneighbourseast 19/01/2023; Armenpress 24/12/2022 and 19/12/2022). Approximately 850 children in Nagorno-Karabakh suffer from congenital heart defects, more than 90 from bronchial asthma, 66 from periodic fever syndrome, 80 from epilepsy, and 16 from diabetes. As their treatment requires them to regularly travel to Armenia, these children have been deprived of proper medical care since the beginning of the blockade on 12 December. The health response of the ICRC is currently supporting some of these children (Radar 17/01/2023; 1Lurer 14/01/2023).

Food security

Since December, transportation disruptions resulting from the blockade have led to essential food shortages in markets. Nagorno-Karabakh relies on 400 tons of daily deliveries of food supplies from Armenia (CFTJ 22/12/2022). The de facto authorities started supplying retailers with imported staple foods, and de facto authorities in Stepanakert limited the sale of some basic foods to ration available stocks. The de facto authorities are providing people with ration stamps to control food availability, although power cuts have closed some of the places providing food vouchers (Arka 09/01/2023; RFE/RL 09/01/2023; News.am 18/01/2023 b). Vegetables and fruits are currently considered luxuries because of their scarcity (CNN 12/01/2023).

Education

The de facto government has announced that it is suspending classes in kindergartens, primary schools, and some secondary schools as a result of the constant gas and electricity disruptions (News.am 18/01/2023 c; WVI 13/01/2023). Supply shortages, including insufficient food for children, are forcing around 30,000 nurseries and kindergartens to close. Disruptions also affect education for college students (CivilNet 09/01/2023; Armenpress 08/01/2023; CFTJ 22/12/2022). The hostilities in September 2022 severely affected education by causing damage to schools and through the resulting psychosocial support needs of children and teachers (IFRC 07/10/2022).



Livelihoods

The region's economy has declined since the conflict in 2020. Mining is the region's main source of tax revenue (RFE/RL 28/12/2022). Nagorno-Karabakh is rich in natural resources, including precious and semiprecious metals, such as gold and copper (Eurasianet 27/01/2021). The de facto leaders in Nagorno-Karabakh have been denying Azerbaijani requests for monitoring access to the mining sites over the years (AA 13/12/2022). Azerbaijanis and environmental activists believe that many mining sites in the area, especially the Kyzylbulag gold and Demirli copper-molybdenum mines, are illegally exploiting and looting natural resources, affecting the environment (Euractiv 28/12/2022; AA 13/12/2022; Daily Sabah 12/12/2022). The blockade has affected access to mining livelihoods in the region. The second largest activity in Nagorno-Karabakh is agriculture, but Azerbaijani ownership of significant portions of land in the area means that it is no longer considered sustainable to have livestock (RFE/RL 28/12/2022; ICG 09/06/2021). The blockade has interrupted over 3,000 jobs and closed almost 700 shops (CivilNet 16/01/2023; Eurasianet 12/01/2023).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Regional tension

The Russian Government has previously intervened to mitigate tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In 2020, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region escalated and resulted in the deaths of more than 140 civilians and thousands of combatants. On 9 November 2020, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia signed a ceasefire agreement to end hostilities, but the end of the conflict was sudden, and the ceasefire terms were unclear (CEIP 11/11/2020). Since the beginning of the blockade, in December 2022, Russia has taken a distant role in the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region because of the war in Ukraine. During the hostilities of September 2022, Armenia called the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Russia for assistance, but the response was a fact-finding mission from the CSTO and a declaration from Russia on the necessity of the demarcation of the Azerbaijan and Armenian border (OC Media 10/10/2022). As at 18 January 2023, Russian peacekeeping troops are present on the Lachin corridor, and the Azerbaijani Government insists that there is no blockade and civilian cars can move freely in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh (Time 18/01/2023; France 24 25/12/2022).



Dependence on imports

The republic of Artsakh, where Nagorno-Karabakh region is located, is highly dependent on its neighbours, particularly Armenia, mostly because of its geographic and diplomatic isolation (FreedomHouse 2022; OCmedia 14/12/2022). As Armenia is highly dependent on both Russia and Ukraine for essential resources, the western sanctions on Russia, because of the war in Ukraine, have increased concerns about Armenia's food supplies. It receives 99% of its wheat imports from Russia and imports sugar, chocolate, confectionery, and butter from Ukraine (HETQ 16/03/2022).

Landmines, cluster munitions, and other unexploded ordnance

Landmines are a legacy of the 1988–1994 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and still affect civilians. There have been more landmine accidents per capita in Nagorno-Karabakh than anywhere else in the world, particularly because of the dependence of many locals on agriculture. One-quarter of the victims have been children. The conflict in 2020 increased the number of unexploded ordnance, especially cluster munitions, on agricultural land (HALO accessed 11/01/2023; Al Jazeera 09/11/2021).

MAP

-  Nagorno-Karabakh (Soviet borders)
-  Area of deployment for Russian peacekeepers



Source: Russian Ministry of Defence



Source: BBC (09/10/2023)