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ARTSAKH

BLOCKADE AND THE FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF THE POPULATION

FACT-FINDING REPORT

The Artsakh Blockade and the Forced Displacement of the Population

fact-finding report

Authorship.

Siranush Sahakyan
Avetik Mejlumyan
Ella Sargsyan
Madlen Mahlamyan
Gurgen Mejlumyan

Interviewers.

Lusine Hakobyan
Gurgen Mejlumyan
Sona Azatyan

Report design.

Astghik Pirumyan

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 5 |
| <i>Research methodology.....</i> | 8 |
| <i>1. Life of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions</i> | 14 |
| <i>2. Safe environment under lockdown</i> | 22 |
| <i>3. Preparation and launch of the September 19, 2023 attack.....</i> | 27 |
| <i>4. Shelter conditions for the civilian population during the September 19 attack</i> | 33 |
| <i>5. Evacuation of the civilian population in September 2023</i> | 40 |
| <i>6. Consequences of the September 2023 attack for life and health</i> | 49 |
| <i>7. Persons missing and captured as a result of the September 2023 attack.....</i> | 56 |
| <i>8. The impact of the September 2023 attack on settlements, state and community property, and the population's vital activity.....</i> | 60 |
| <i>9. The Forced Displacement of the Population from Artsakh</i> | 65 |
| <i>10. Losses of private property as a result of the forced displacement of the population of Artsakh</i> | 80 |
| <i>11. The Subsequent Life of Artsakh Residents in the Republic of Armenia</i> | 85 |
| <i>Conclusions</i> | 94 |
| <i>1. Life of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions</i> | 94 |
| <i>2. The Security Environment under Blockade Conditions</i> | 94 |
| <i>3. Preparation and Launch of the Attack of September 19, 2023</i> | 94 |
| <i>4. Shelter Conditions for the Civilian Population during the September 19 Attack</i> | 95 |
| <i>5. Evacuation of the Civilian Population in September 2023</i> | 95 |
| <i>6. Consequences of the September 2023 Attack for Life and Health</i> | 96 |
| <i>7. Missing and Captured Persons as a Result of the September 2023 Attack</i> | 97 |
| <i>8. Impact of the September 2023 Attack on Settlements, State and Community Property, and Civilian Life.....</i> | 97 |
| <i>9. Forced Displacement of the Population from Artsakh.....</i> | 98 |
| <i>10. Loss of Private Property as a Result of the Forced Displacement of the Population of Artsakh</i> | 98 |
| <i>11. Subsequent Life of Artsakh Residents in the Republic of Armenia</i> | 99 |
| <i>Legal Assessment</i> | 100 |
| <i>1. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions</i> | 100 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 2. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh during the Military Operations Initiated by Azerbaijan in September 2023 | 101 |
| 3. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh as a Result of Forced Displacement ... | 103 |

Introduction

The blockade of Artsakh that began in December 2022 and the forced displacement of the population in September 2023 represent a new phase of systemic pressure and ethnic cleansing carried out against the Armenian people. This report documents these processes through human stories, bringing to light hundreds of incidents of violence and violations directed against human dignity, as well as manifestations of the security crisis, and provides their legal assessment within the framework of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Historical, Political and Military Context

The roots of the Artsakh conflict date back to the history of the Soviet Union, when in 1988 the Armenian population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) demanded reunification with Armenia. Both the pre-Soviet and Soviet administrations of Azerbaijan pursued a consistent policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at “clearing” Artsakh - an area with a millennia-old Armenian history - of its indigenous population, the Armenians, through both violent and non-violent methods. The NKAO had effectively been turned into a colonial appendage of Soviet Azerbaijan, where discriminatory policies were implemented against Armenians, who constituted the majority of the population, across economic, political, educational, cultural, and other spheres.

As a result of the 1991–1994 war, Artsakh effectively formed an independent state structure, possessing a constitution, a government, and elected authorities. Despite this reality, the international community exercised caution regarding the recognition of Artsakh’s independence.

The 44-day war that began in September 2020 with a large-scale attack by Azerbaijan, fundamentally altered the balance of forces. Most of Artsakh came under Azerbaijani control, while Russian peacekeeping forces were deployed in the remaining part in accordance with the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020. That statement envisioned a free communication between Armenia and Artsakh through the Lachin Corridor, under the supervision of Russian peacekeepers.

However, starting from December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan closed the Lachin Corridor, initially under the pretext of an “environmental” action, and later taking full control over it. This created a complete blockade around Artsakh, restricting the entry of food, fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid. The blockade effectively became a tool of collective punishment against the population, aimed at forcing the Armenian population of Artsakh to abandon their homeland.

In parallel with the blockade, Azerbaijan continued its policy of military and psychological pressure through provocations, gunfire, threats, and other actions of information warfare. The peak of the crisis was Azerbaijan’s large-scale attack launched on September 19, 2023, as a result of which, within a few days, Artsakh was deprived of its self-defense capacity, and the population of its right to exist in its homeland.

As a direct consequence of the attack, the forced displacement of the population occurred, resulting in the compulsory removal of more than 100,000 Artsakh Armenians from their homes.

This process, under international law, corresponds to elements of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Research Goal and Objectives

The aim of the study was to document the processes of the blockade of Artsakh and the forced displacement of the population, as well as the mass human rights violations resulting from these processes.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To collect, systematize, and analyze extensive factual material reflecting the conditions and experiences of people's daily lives during the stages of the blockade, the attack, and displacement.
2. To identify patterns of human rights violations in order to reveal their possible systemic nature and the deliberate targets of Azerbaijan's state policy.
3. To formulate a legal assessment by correlating the recorded facts with the fundamental provisions of international law, in particular based on:
 - the Geneva Conventions,
 - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
 - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
 - norms on the prevention of crimes against humanity, and other international legal instruments.
4. To contribute to the restoration of justice and to the formation of a factual basis for further legal processes aimed at protecting the rights of displaced Artsakh Armenians.

Report Structure

The report consists of 11 thematic sections or chapters that reflect the stages of the blockade, the attack, and the forced displacement.

The initial chapters present the conditions of the population's daily life during the blockade, marked by the disruption of access to food, energy, water, communications, medical care, and education. The subsequent sections examine the security environment, the preparatory period preceding the attack, and the course of the military operations.

The following chapters shed light on the conditions of sheltering and evacuation of the civilian population, the damage inflicted on life, health, and property as a result of the attack, as well as cases of enforced disappearance and capture.

The final sections of the report focus on the process of the forced displacement of the population, property losses, and the subsequent lives of the displaced persons in Armenia.

In the concluding part, conclusions are presented by thematic sections.

Based on the content of the report and its conclusions, legal assessments of mass human rights violations are provided in the form of legal characterizations, grouped into three thematic sections:

1. Violations of the rights of the population of Artsakh under conditions of the blockade;
2. Violations of the rights of the population of Artsakh as a result of the military actions initiated by Azerbaijan in September 2023;
3. Violations of the rights of the population of Artsakh as a result of forced displacement.

The Practical Significance of the Report

The report is intended to serve as a documented basis for legal proceedings for:

- international institutions (the UN, EU, Council of Europe, International Criminal Court, and others),
- national and international organizations engaged in the protection of human rights,
- academic and political analytical circles and experts.

It may be used in both national and international courts as evidence of the violations committed against the Armenian population of Artsakh. The study may also be useful for developing public policies aimed at the social and legal protection of displaced persons, psychological rehabilitation, and the protection of property rights.

Finally, this report serves as a means of preserving individual and collective memory. By recording individual human stories, it emphasizes that they cannot be viewed as isolated cases, but rather as components of a shared loss and trauma. The study has not only legal value, but also social and anthropological significance: it documents and records people's memory, revealing the full picture of a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe.

This fact-finding report confirms that the actions carried out against the Armenian population of Artsakh were systematic in nature and aimed at eliminating the presence of Armenians in the region. Therefore, it is not only a record of the past, but also a foundation for future accountability and justice.

Research methodology

Data Acquisition Method

Data collection was carried out through qualitative research, specifically through in-depth individual interviews conducted with persons forcibly displaced from Artsakh.

The interviewers asked several dozen questions, giving respondents the opportunity to speak about their personal, family, and community experiences. The interview guide was a semi-structured questionnaire, the thematic sections of which largely correspond to the structure of this report - its chapters or thematic sections.

The respondents spoke without any restrictions, while the interviewers' additional and clarifying questions made it possible to enrich the data and uncover new facts. Given the scope of the questions, the average duration of each interview exceeded one hour.

The Sample

The interviews were conducted with displaced persons residing in the Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Aragatsotn, and Lori regions, as well as in Yerevan. The selection of locations was обусловлено by the fact that it was possible to ensure the greatest representativeness of the displaced persons' former places of residence in Artsakh. In other words, the respondents living in the mentioned regions and in Yerevan ensured a diverse and well-represented range of Artsakh's different regions and settlements.

Prior to the start of the interviews, the research team, with the support of regional and community authorities, as well as partner civil society and charitable organizations, compiled lists of Artsakh families settled in various localities. The families were grouped according to their former place of residence, by Artsakh settlements. The number of families from each Artsakh settlement located in the given locality in Armenia was recorded.

The interviews were conducted in several phases.

In the first phase, families were randomly selected from the compiled lists, and the interviewers visited these households.

The selection of the individual respondent within each family was based on:

1. The person's awareness and competence to answer as many questions from the questionnaire as possible. Interviewers familiarized themselves with the family and, through a brief conversation, determined which family member possessed the most comprehensive knowledge and with whom the interview could be conducted most effectively.

2. The possibility of ensuring gender and age diversity among respondents. Previous experience from similar studies indicated that middle-aged women were most likely to agree to participate. Taking this natural bias into account, interviewers, wherever possible, conducted interviews not with the middle-aged woman but with another family member (a young woman or man, a middle-aged man, or an elderly woman or man). Naturally, the first principle described above (awareness and competence) was also taken into consideration.

Although interviewers sought to apply the principle of gender and age diversity as much as possible, middle-aged women still predominated among respondents. One reason was that many men were involved either in regular armed forces or local self-defense groups and were not present with their families during the Azerbaijani attack, sheltering, and evacuation. Consequently, they were not aware of the details of these processes or the immediate emotional and psychological responses.

In fact, the personal characteristics of respondents were not a primary concern within the scope of this research, as the main priority was to ensure the richest and most diverse range of data.

After conducting a certain number of interviews (not exceeding about ten), the research team compiled a list of their former Artsakh places of residence and, in the next phase of selection, sought to avoid choosing families representing the same localities. In other words, in each subsequent phase of selection, priority was given to families whose places of residence had not been represented in previous phases. Thanks to this approach and periodic adjustments in selection, new localities that had not been included before were gradually incorporated into the study.

A relatively larger number of respondents from cities were included, as their experiences were likely to be more diverse compared to those from small villages with a homogeneous social composition.

The main criterion for concluding the research was the repetition of the data obtained, that is, the absence of new or unusual information. Another criterion was ensuring the maximum diversity of Artsakh localities.

After including a sufficient number of distinct localities and ensuring the richness of the data, the research team decided to conclude the interviews.

Gender and Age Composition of Respondents and Their Distribution by Settlement in Artsakh

In total, 83 interviews were conducted.

The average age of the respondents was 48 years. The largest age group was 40–50 years old, comprising approximately 28% of the respondents.

Of the respondents, 34 (or 41%) were men, and 49 (or 59%) were women.

As of September 2023, at the start of the forced displacement of the population from Artsakh, the respondents resided in:¹

- In the capital Stepanakert - 22 respondents (26.5%),
- Martuni region - 22 respondents (26.5%),
- Askeran region - 21 respondents (25.3%),
- Martakert region - 18 respondents (21.7%).

The almost equal distribution of respondents across the regions of Artsakh indicates the proportionality of the selection and good geographical representativeness.

The representation of localities is also notable:

- From Martuni region - Martuni and Chartar towns and 10 rural localities,
- From Askeran region - Askeran town and 16 rural localities,
- From Martakert region - Martakert town and 11 rural localities.

Thus, the respondents represented 5 cities of Artsakh (including the capital) and 37 rural localities.

The number of respondents by Artsakh locality is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Number of respondents by regions and settlements of Artsakh.

| Residence | Number of respondents |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Capital City | |
| Stepanakert | 22 |
| Martuni Region | |
| Martuni | 6 |
| Chartar | 3 |
| Kaghartsi | 2 |

¹ It is important to note that these were the respondents' places of residence as of September 2023. Some individuals had relocated to these localities in 2020 from other areas of Artsakh that came under Azerbaijani control. For example, some respondents had moved to the capital, Stepanakert, or other regions from Hadrut, Shushi, Kashatagh, and other territories taken over by Azerbaijan as a result of the 44-day war. For these individuals, the forced displacement in 2023 thus represented a source of double victimization and double trauma.

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Herher | 2 |
| Sos | 2 |
| Berdashen | 1 |
| Karmir Shuka | 1 |
| Nngi | 1 |
| Paravatumb | 1 |
| Spitakashen | 1 |
| Karahunj | 1 |
| Kert | 1 |
| Total: | 22 |
| Askeran Region | |
| Askeran | 2 |
| Badara | 2 |
| Sarushen | 2 |
| Nerkin Sznek | 2 |
| Atghashen | 1 |
| Dahrav | 1 |
| Ivanyan | 1 |
| Lusadzor | 1 |
| Khachen | 1 |
| Khnapat | 1 |
| Khndzristan | 1 |
| Karmir Gyugh | 1 |
| Moshkhmhat | 1 |

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Nakhijevanik | 1 |
| Aygestan | 1 |
| Shosh | 1 |
| Rev | 1 |
| Total: | 21 |
| Martakert Region | 5 |
| Martakert | 2 |
| Arajadzor | 2 |
| Chankatagh | 1 |
| Zaglik | 1 |
| Kolkhozashen | 1 |
| Kusapat | 1 |
| Haterk | 1 |
| Maghavuz | 1 |
| Mets Shen | 1 |
| Nerkin Horatagh | 1 |
| Chldran | 1 |
| Vardadzor | 1 |
| Total: | 18 |

Data Recording and Analysis

Wherever and whenever possible, the interviewers also collected photographs, copies of documents, videos, and other evidence supporting the respondents' oral testimonies. The respondents also indicated additional information available from open online sources (mainly videos).

All interviews were recorded, with the respondents' consent, both in writing and orally. Based on these recordings, detailed, verbatim transcriptions were prepared.

All respondents, by signing the relevant document, gave their informed consent for the collection and future use of the provided information. In particular, they were informed and agreed that:

- The provided information, documents, photographs, or items may be used within the framework of legal proceedings and may be shared with competent state and/or international authorities, including investigative bodies.
- The provided information, documents, photographs, or items may be used for the preparation of reports, analyses, and other publications.

During the analysis phase, both unique and individual experiences, as well as collective experiences, were identified and reflected in the report. Where possible, general or widespread patterns were highlighted, while at the same time noting phenomena that deviated from these patterns.

Quotations from respondents in the report are presented verbatim - without any changes or editing. In certain cases, where the Artsakh dialect or context was considered difficult to understand, editorial notes and explanations have been provided.

1. Life of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions

As a result of the blockade initiated by Azerbaijan in December 2022, the Armenian population of Artsakh faced numerous hardships, which progressively intensified in May–June 2023.

Three main phases can be identified in terms of the severity of the problems caused by the blockade and the deepening of their negative impact on people:

- from December 2022 to May–June 2023,
- from June 2023 to September 2023,
- September 2023 until the forced displacement of the population.

In each of these phases, an increase in the scale and intensity of the problems was observed.

Shortage of Food and the Feeling of Hunger

During the blockade, one of the main problems was the shortage of food. Many respondents noted that due to the lack of food, they often went hungry. For example, a resident of Stepanakert stated that he went six days without bread. Others mentioned that they divided bread among family members, and at times baked bread at home using low-quality flour or bran. Despite this, many managed to survive by using local fruits, vegetables, and similar resources. The International Committee of the Red Cross also provided food supplies.

The food shortage was felt particularly acutely in the capital, where the population did not have the same opportunities for animal husbandry and agriculture as rural residents. The population of the regions provided substantial food support to Stepanakert; however, movement was problematic due to fuel shortages. One respondent noted that food was brought to Stepanakert in a backpack from the village of Nngi in the Martuni region. In Stepanakert, the authorities implemented rationing for various food items by introducing a coupon system. For example, one liter of cooking oil per month, as well as specified amounts of grains and sugar, were distributed.

Due to the food shortage, many families were forced to resort to extreme measures, such as using bran intended for feeding livestock to bake bread. In many cases, people were forced to stand in bread lines for hours, sometimes even for days. There were frequent instances when, after waiting in line for an entire day, people were still unable to purchase anything because the food had run out.

A resident of the capital, Stepanakert, stated that per person, only half a loaf of bread was available per day. This ration gradually decreased. During the final period of the blockade, each person was receiving only 200 grams per day of low-quality bread.

The shortage of sweets caused particular difficulties for children. Many families were forced to use fruits and vegetables as substitutes for sweets. The lack of sweets also led to psychological problems, especially among children.

The respondents noted that grocery stores were empty, and after June 15, 2023, only alcohol was available in shops.

The absence of certain food products forced people to resort to extreme measures. A respondent from Zaglik village in the Martakert region stated: “We didn’t have salt to add to the food, we didn’t have oil to cook meals. We brought the salt that is scattered along roadsides to melt snow, boiled it 2–3 times, and only then put it into the food.”

“There were days when we were left without bread.”

“We couldn’t find even a spoonful of coffee; sometimes we ground barley and drank it as coffee.”

“We overcame hunger together to some extent. We managed to get some things; it’s not like we were completely starving.”

“There was a day when, if I managed to get bread - two loaves - I brought them home, froze one loaf and put it in the freezer, and cut the other loaf into 8–9 pieces and gave those 8–9 pieces to our older and younger children over 3–4 days.”

“Children found Snickers wrappers and asked for money to buy candy.”

“We walked past shops with our children but with our eyes closed so they wouldn’t ask for candy.”

“One day my daughter found a Snickers wrapper on the ground and said, ‘Dad, will you give me money?’ He asked, ‘For what?’ She said, ‘I’m going to the shop.’ The father gave 1,000 drams. She went to the shop and said she wanted candy, and the shop worker didn’t know what to say. She said, ‘I’ll tell you a trick, go heat sugar in a spoon, it becomes candy.’ Armen did that method; we made it once every three days. The children were so happy with it, as if it was the end of the world.”

Bread and Food Queues

Bread and food queues had become an everyday, routine occurrence. People were forced to stand in line for hours, sometimes for days, in order to obtain bread. Tension, stress, and conflicts arose among people in the queues. In many cases, people fainted in the lines from hunger and exhaustion.

In many instances, people stood in line during nighttime hours so that they might at least be able to buy bread in the morning. However, often even after waiting in line, they received nothing.

“There was already a kind of savagery among the people; it was a struggle for survival.”

“When we remembered that we had to go stand in the bread lines... It was as if... I was watching from the side - half were in tears, half emotionally overwhelmed, half hungry, half... I don’t know how to describe it, I don’t know how it can be described.”

“There are people who come and stand in line for 20 hours, then go home without anything, come back the next morning and see that some people have made a new list and they are not on that list, and they have to stand in line for another 10 hours in order to get something.”

Price increases of food and other goods

Under the conditions of the blockade, the prices of food and other goods rose sharply. For example, the price of a single egg reached 800 drams (an increase of about 10–15 times), while the price of one kilogram of sugar reached 10,000 drams (an increase of more than 20 times).

In Stepanakert, the price of potatoes reached 3,000 drams, beans 5,000 drams, and cooking oil reached 10,000 drams. Cucumbers were sold for 2,000 drams and tomatoes for 3,000 drams. In Stepanakert, many goods were sold by Russian peacekeepers. As one respondent noted, they were jokingly referred to as *mirotvortsi-targovtsi* (peacekeepers–traders – ed.).

Russian peacekeepers sold villagers flour at 2,000 drams per kilogram, while its price in the city of Martakert reached 2,500 drams.

The peacekeepers sold one package of salt for 3,000 drams and one bar of soap for 5,000 drams.

Fuel prices also rose sharply. For example, 20 liters of diesel purchased for agricultural work in the village of Aradjadzor in the Martakert region cost 60,000 drams. In the village of Vardadzor in the Martakert region, after June it was purchased for 10,000 or 20,000 rubles. Twenty liters of gasoline in the village of Kusapat in the Martakert region cost 50,000 drams and even reached 90,000 drams.

In many cases, people were forced to resort to barter, as monetary resources were insufficient. Mutual assistance was especially important for children and the elderly, who were the most vulnerable under blockade conditions.

“We bought a single cigarette for 3,000 drams, a whole pack of cigarettes.”

“One pack of cigarettes in Stepanakert cost 5,000 drams at the end of August.”

“People mainly bought cigarettes so that later they could barter them for something else - oil, sugar, and so on.”

“A Toyota Camry was exchanged for 100 cartons of cigarettes brought by the peacekeepers.”

Water

During periods of electricity outages, water pumps did not operate, which caused difficulties. In many villages, the water supply was cut off, and people were forced to store water in buckets.

In some neighborhoods of Stepanakert, water problems were addressed through alternative methods, for example by bringing water from springs. Water shortages were particularly severe during the summer months, when demand for water was high.

“We had the water cut off, and we stored water in buckets.”

Electricity

Both gas and electricity supplies from Armenia to Artsakh were cut off by Azerbaijan, as a result of which electricity supply in Artsakh was unstable.

In the initial period of the blockade, electricity was supplied for 6 hours at a time, later for 4 hours, and in the final months of the blockade electricity was supplied for only 2 hours per day. During certain periods, there was no electricity at all.

In Stepanakert, electricity supply was relatively more stable, but difficulties arose during the winter. Due to the lack of electricity, people were forced to use generators, however, fuel shortages hindered their long-term operation.

In many homes, special lamps were used that provided lighting for several hours in the absence of electricity. The instability of electricity also affected water supply, as water pumps could not operate without power.

“The power would go out, and we charged our phones using the car battery.”

“They charged the phones using the kindergarten’s solar panels.”

Heating

Gas supply in Artsakh was completely discontinued as of March 2023. In the Shushi area, the functioning of the pipelines supplying gas from Armenia was damaged or obstructed due to interference by the Azerbaijani side.

The primary means of heating was firewood. In some schools, heating was provided using firewood, while in other cases schools were not heated at all. In many villages, gas supply had already been cut off in December 2022, which had severe consequences during the winter months. People were forced to use firewood for heating, but shortages of firewood also posed a serious problem.

In many cases, people were forced to live in cold conditions during the winter months, which was particularly difficult for children and the elderly.

“Our village was not gasified at all. The gas had been cut off since December.”

Communication and Transport

Problems related to transport and communication were among the most acute. Due to fuel shortages, people were unable to move around, even to transport patients to hospitals.

In many cases, people were forced to walk long distances. For example, some walked from Martuni to Stepanakert, covering approximately 45 kilometers.

Public transportation ceased operating in June 2023. The absence of transport had particularly severe consequences for villages, from which residents could not reach nearby towns to obtain food or medicine.

In many cases, people had to use animals - horses or donkeys - for transportation.

Issues of communication, transport, and information exchange were especially problematic for cooperation between state and local authorities. Connections between communities and regional centers were disrupted.

The limited fuel distributed through coupons was primarily used for agricultural work.

Transport problems were especially evident in the transportation of food: it was extremely difficult to transport wheat from fields to mills or to deliver agricultural products from the regions to the capital.

Children often had to walk long distances to attend school and kindergarten.

In the capital, attempts were made to organize transportation using electric vehicles. In the regions, animals - horses and donkeys replaced transport. Bicycles also played an important role.

“I was getting around Martuni by bicycle. It was very difficult. But I would go to Stepanakert and come back by bicycle.”

“You had to call the administration, the administration would give 5 liters of gasoline, and even then you would go and get stranded on the road.”

“Fuel was given to workers in calculated amounts, gram by gram, based on how much was needed per hectare, for targeted use.”

“There was no way to provide it, there was no fuel, they wouldn't provide it. Even when my child had a 40-degree fever, they still wouldn't provide fuel to take him. We did it ourselves, we paid 45,000 drams for 20 liters of gasoline to take the child to the hospital.”

Internet and Telephone Communication

Internet provision depended on electricity. When there was no power, internet access was also unavailable.

On several occasions, Azerbaijan cut the internet cable, disrupting communications.

Telephone service generally existed, but its quality was poor. It was not possible to talk on the phone for long in Stepanakert.

In many cases, people were forced to charge their phones using car batteries or solar panels. Communication problems were particularly severe in rural areas, where internet access had been limited even under normal conditions (prior to the blockade).

“The connection was terrible; phone calls lasted no more than a minute, and even then not properly.”

“There were times when you wanted to call one person during the day and struggled for three hours just to be able to make the call.”

Medical Assistance

Medical assistance issues were among the most difficult and sensitive. Due to the shortage of medicines, many patients were unable to receive necessary treatment. Some were forced to use substitutes for medications, which led to serious health problems.

In many cases, patients were treated at home. Pregnant women and persons with disabilities suffered the most. There was no fuel to transport patients to Armenia, which resulted in deaths. The lack of medical assistance was especially severe for children and the elderly, who were unable to receive the necessary care.

In the capital, Stepanakert, only two ambulances operated sporadically; people mostly transported patients to hospitals in their own vehicles.

“During the blockade, I had a problem. I had to take a medication, and I took another one along with it that had not been prescribed to me, but was a substitute for my medication, because there were no medicines at all in Artsakh at that time.”

“And I developed an allergy, had a severe allergic reaction, and at that moment, fortunately, there was some fuel for the ambulance, and thanks to that fuel I reached the hospital. If that fuel had not been available, according to the doctor, I simply would not have survived a few hours later.”

“There was no way to arrange anything; there was no fuel, they would not provide it. Even when my child had a fever of 40 degrees, they still did not provide fuel to take him. We did it ourselves - we paid 45,000 drams for 20 liters of gasoline to take the child to the hospital.”

“From morning till night we were thinking about how to manage our patient’s issues, how to find food for a small child.”

Education

Problems related to children's education included interruptions of classes, heating problems in schools, and children's malnutrition.

In many cases, classes were conducted online, but this also created difficulties. The absence of electricity in homes or the intermittent supply of electricity hindered education.

Kindergartens were mostly closed, with the exception of the city of Martuni, since food was available in the Martuni kindergarten.

The volume of classes in schools was reduced, and in some cases schools were merged in order to save fuel.

A vivid example of interrupted education is the story told by a respondent from Chldran village in the Martakert region: *"During the blockade, my older son went to Stepanakert to study to become a programmer, but it was impossible to stay there. He had to come home and travel every day by transport. Then, during the blockade, when transport was no longer available, his studies were left unfinished. Later he came here (meaning Armenia – ed.), and since it was left unfinished, he went back to the twelfth grade again."*

Children often went to school hungry, which negatively affected their studies. In many cases, children were unable to attend school due to the lack of transportation, as they could not reach the school or university on foot.

An obstacle to education was the lack of glucose among children, the shortage of sweet tea and sweets in general. This caused headaches and weakness. The majority of respondents noted this problem and stated that children's malnutrition prevented them from concentrating on their lessons. There were cases of students fainting.

"Children went to school with sweetened water, but when they reached school they became weak."

"At least we made sweetened water and gave it to the children so they could go to school. But there were cases when they reached school, called us, and said the child was not well, felt weak, and told us to come and take them home."

"My daughter was a schoolgirl. During that period her shoes tore, and I couldn't find replacements for her in the shops, so for quite a long time she was absent from classes because of that."

Issues concerning children

Young children suffered particularly due to the lack of food and hygiene. The shortage of food and hygiene items for newborns was an especially acute problem.

Many children were also deprived of education and recreation, which negatively affected their psychological state.

“In the end there was no shampoo either, so that I could bathe the children.”

“The child was constantly crying, holding their breath, swallowing their tongue; during those days it happened very often, even up to now. There isn’t a hospital in Yerevan that we haven’t visited. They prescribed sedatives, and thanks to that it became a little easier.”

Psychological problems

During the blockade, people faced psychological problems such as fear of hunger, insecurity, and uncertainty about the future. Many noted that tension and stress were the main causes of psychological problems.

Azerbaijan’s military exercises and information coming from positions kept the people of Artsakh in constant tension.

Psychological tension sometimes took extreme forms; for example, in the city of Stepanakert, one man fired shots into the air, explaining that he had no bread to feed his children.

“We waited every moment to see whether we would live or die. How we adapted, we don’t know.”

“You don’t know whether tomorrow you will have bread or not.”

2. Safe environment under lockdown

The population of Artsakh lived through a profound security crisis during the blockade, characterized by constant threats, psychological pressure, and an atmosphere of uncertainty. People were under continuous tension, without a clear understanding of when and where the next blow might occur. This situation led not only to the loss of a sense of physical security, but also to severe psychological consequences, including a diminished sense of the value of life. Tensions were especially acute in areas bordering Azerbaijan, intensifying fear and anxiety. Daily life became unpredictable, and acts of violence occurring on the road leading to Armenia increased feelings of despair. Residents reported that they did not feel safe even in their own yards and homes.

The absence of essential goods needed to meet basic needs (food, gas, gasoline, medicine, and others) further exacerbated people's suffering. This situation was particularly severe for children and the elderly, who were more psychologically vulnerable.

"A sniper could shoot me even in our yard."

"Life had no value in such a situation. We lived as if a sword was hanging over our heads, and every moment we were expecting the final blow."

"You don't know, even in your own home, what tomorrow will bring."

"The cases of people being detained on the road while traveling to Armenia (referring to the arrest of Vagif Khachatryan and young football players at the checkpoint – ed.) also had a negative impact. People were afraid to move even within their own territory."

"When you are cut off from your mother country, that in itself is enormous pressure."

"The absence or high cost of various goods was also perceived as pressure."

Threats and psychological pressure

Threats and psychological pressure against the population of Artsakh persisted and gradually intensified during the period of the blockade. The Azerbaijani side sought to eliminate any sign of resistance, which led to the deliberate instillation of fear and the use of various methods of psychological pressure.

The threats took different forms, ranging from direct gunfire and military actions to more subtle methods of psychological pressure, such as threats broadcast through loudspeakers and the creation of artificial noise during nighttime hours. All of this resulted in constant stress and despair among the population.

“I remember there was a very large rally in Artsakh, and on the same day the Azerbaijanis fired artillery from Shushi at military positions so that the sound would be heard and people would disperse.”

“We felt that we were being monitored at every step. Even in our own homes we felt unsafe.”

Border tension

Proximity to the border and the visible presence of Azerbaijanis created a constant sense of threat. Residents knew that the adversary was only a few hundred meters away, which turned their lives into a state of constant anticipation and absence of a sense of security.

In border villages the situation was more severe, as residents were exposed to immediate danger. Their daily lives became unpredictable, and everyday activities (such as sending children to school or engaging in agricultural work) were accompanied by constant fear.

“If you know that your enemy is just a few meters away... you still don’t sleep peacefully. You send your child to school and you’re not calm.”

“Sometimes drones monitored the border areas, and people did not know whether a bomb would be dropped on them or not.”

“There is always a threat there, every day is a threat. You are afraid, you don’t go anywhere.”

“On the peak of the mountain of our village there are Turks. They were talking and laughing, but we were not afraid, even though we knew they were our enemies.”

Gunfire and Violence

In border villages, gunfire has become an everyday occurrence. The Azerbaijani side frequently opened fire, targeting not only military facilities but also civilians, schools, and agricultural workers.

Alongside the gunfire, cease of direct violence were also recorded. This situation was especially severe for those engaged in agriculture, who were forced to work under fire.

There are testimonies indicating that shots were fired at those carrying out renovation works at the Amaras Monastery. Fire was also opened on a combine harvester operator in the village of Sos in the Martuni region.

Overall, gunfire occurred in various border areas of Artsakh – Khromort, Khnaberd, Nakhijevanik, Nerkin Sznek, Sarushen in the Askeran region; Vardadzor and Jankatagh in the Martakert region; Sos, Machkalashen, Karmir Shuka, and other villages in the Martuni region, as well as in the city of Chartar in the Martuni region.

In addition to gunfire, other types of threatening situations also arose. Near the village of Zaglik in the Martakert region, while passing by in the vehicles, Azerbaijan shouted insults and drove their cars in a threatening manner toward local vehicles.

“They were firing mortars at the village. With automatic weapons, mortars – toward the school, toward the village – shooting like that, doing things.”

“A case was recorded when a bullet grazed a child’s back, causing scratch.”

“The head of Sarushen village took his child and stood him next to the combine harvester so that at least they would not shoot at it.”

“In the Martuni region they shot at a combine harvester operator, and in another case, a villager who had gone to bring back the cows was seized and killed.”

“My wife and daughter-in-law were working right in the neighboring village (Jankatagh – ed.), right on the border. They were under direct fire – one kilometer, 800 or 700 meters away. There were bursts of gunfire. They were afraid.”

“It would hit one person’s roof, fall into another person’s yard.”

“They were constantly shooting at Karmir Shuka; there was a case when a cartridge entered someone’s house. Once they fired and blew up some vehicles right near the school and kindergarten.”

Threatening Statements

Threats broadcast by Azerbaijanis through loudspeakers became an everyday occurrence. These statements were often accompanied by intimidating calls, insults, and sometimes music or other audio messages aimed at disrupting the residents’ psychological balance.

These methods were used especially at night, when people were trying to rest, leading to sleep disturbances and a constant feeling of fatigue. In addition, the announcements often contained false information intended to sow panic and distrust toward local authorities.

Near the village of Khachen, Azerbaijanis announced through loudspeakers – audio to residents – that “... they may come and slaughter [people] in their homes.” Near the village of Taghavard, loudspeakers announced, “Come out, come out.” In the Martuni region as well, vehicles equipped with loudspeakers circulated, propagating that it was Azerbaijani territory and that residents had to leave it. Near Nerkin Sznek, Azerbaijanis emitted sounds resembling howling.

These calls were mostly made in Russian, and in fewer cases in Armenian.

In addition to the threatening announcements, Azerbaijanis at times used unpleasant, loud music or the call to prayer (namaz) as a means of pressure. In Taghavard, for example, they played mugham, and near the city of Martuni – a mullah’s sermon.

“I don’t know what they turned on from Shushi - they were shouting. They were making calls, saying, Armenians, we will kill you.”

“My brother, who was near Aghdam, said that every morning they announced through loudspeakers: come out, it’s going to be bad, leave.”

Threats Voiced in State-Level Messages

Statements and threats made by Azerbaijan at the state level became an important instrument of psychological pressure. These statements were disseminated through official media outlets as well as via television and radio.

The threats were often accompanied by political demands and had a clear aim of exerting psychological influence. They deepened the sense of insecurity and led to a froging feeling of despair among the population.

“Aliyev stated that if they do not sign and remain within Azerbaijan, then we will carry out anti-terrorist measures.”

"We were always afraid that if it didn't happen today (ed.), they would take it the next day."

Online Threats

Threats and misinformation spread via the internet became tools of psychological pressure. Azerbaijani users actively disseminated information about the imminent outbreak of war, frightening videos, and threats.

These actions intensifies particularly in the final months of the vlockade, when the population of Artsakh was living under extremely harsh conditions. Online threats were accompanied by phone calls and SMS messages containing false information about evacuation or other urgent measures.

“Pro-Azerbaijani media were writing: kill them with hunger or we will massacre them outright.”

“They would call the administration, claiming to be Russian peacekeepers, saying that they were warning us to leave.”

The Role of Peacekeepers

The activities of the Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh received mixed assessments. On the one hand, in some cases they were able to prevent escalation and served as a link between the local

population and the Azerbaijani side. On the other hand, they were often powerless or indifferent to tense situations, which created additional dissatisfaction among the local population.

Opinions about the peacekeepers' activities varied greatly depending on specific incidents and personal experience. Some residents noted that the peacekeepers tried to help, while others accused them of inaction or even of cooperation with the Azerbaijani side.

"They couldn't influence the events; there are 1,800 of them - what could they do?"

"If a turk comes and grabs you, slaughters you, the Russian won't do anything; they're afraid."

"The peacekeepers distributed sweets to the children, even played football with them."

"The turk comes and shoots, and the peacekeeper does not let us shoot."

"What angered us most was their inaction. There was a case when Azerbaijan shot a tractor driver, killed him, and the peacekeepers did nothing."

The Role of Artsakh Authorities

The Artsakh authorities faced accusations from the population of organizational failures and inaction. Many residents states that the authorities did not take sufficient measures to ensure the population's safety and to meet basic needs. In some cases, the authorities acted as intermediaries between the Russian peacekeepers and the local population, trying to ease tense situations.

"...but at least something positive - at least give hope, say 'don't be afraid, we've agreed, we're handing it over, you go stay in your homes for two days, get ready for it, if you have valuables, somehow organize and take them so you can leave calmly.' Those two words were never said. People were left in panic, without clear instructions."

"People were being slaughtered at the post, there was no bread, and officials were bringing cigarettes and selling them for 100 drams per piece, treating people like fools, selling them one by one."

3. Preparation and launch of the September 19, 2023 attack

Preparation for the Attack and Psychological Assault

On September 19, 2023, the large-scale military operations launched by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh were the result of a long-term and meticulously planned operation. In the months preceding this attack, the Azerbaijani side carried out a variety of provocative actions in three main directions:

1. Strategic Preparation

- Systematic accumulation of troops and military equipment along the line of contact.
- Modernization of military infrastructure and deployment of artillery and UAV systems.
- Training of military personnel jointly with Turkish specialists.

2. Border Escalation

- Organization of periodic artillery and small-arms incidents.
- Provocative actions directed at border villages.
- Artificial creation of tense situations at jointly monitored checkpoint with peacekeeping forces.

3. Psychological Pressure

- Use of loud noise effects towards residential areas (messages broadcast through loudspeakers, frightening or unpleasant sounds, Azerbaijani music).
- A coordinated campaign of psychological pressure on social networks.
- Direct threats addressed to the local populations.

A large number of respondents noted that they had always expected an attack, drawing conclusions both from the methods of psychological pressure used by the Azerbaijani side and from concrete actions.

“They were constantly calling on Artsakh residents to get ready, saying that Stepanakert would soon be theirs.”

“When they closed the Lachin Corridor, everyone knew that there would be a war.”

“They were saying such things, that fighting would start, saying they would bring the flag and put it on the president’s building.”

A resident of Khndzristan village in the Askeran region notes that under one of his Facebook posts an Azerbaijan wrote:

“Don’t be afraid offended by anyone else, be offended only by leaders; in two or three days the war will start, we need to arrest your leaders.”

Another respondent from Stepanakert noted that:

“On September 17 they started speaking with insults. They said ‘Just see what we are going to do to you.’ Then the gihting started right from our position. We suffered casualties; they forcibly brought the women down and said, ‘You go to your homes, you have nothing to do.’”

All these threats and troop concentrations had a sharply negative impact on Artsakh residents, creating a contant sense of anxiety among them. The methods of psychological pressure had a particularly strong effect on children and the elderly.

A resident of Khachen village in the Askeran region notes:

“You think about a thousand and one things, you say, there is a small child, what about these youung people...”

A resident of Herher village in the Martuni region stated that:

“My grandmother was trembling; at one moment she fainted.”

Another important warning sign was the concentration of troops.

A resident of Nerkin Sznek village in the Askeran region stated:

“Overall, before Seotember 19, we were regularly informed that there were constant buildups. The village had been surrounded over these three years. We often even saw with the naked eye (since it was very close to the village - only a few hundred meters to the Azerbaijani positions, both directy and from the right, on both sides) that both engineering works increased and heavy equipment was moving. We noticed that soemthing was happening, but we did not think that it would ultimately turn into such a large-scale war”

Another respondent noted that:

“Before September 19, there were already such a report that there were buildups at the contact area between the Armenian-populated part of Artsakh and the Azerbaijani side, that there were concentrations of Azerbaijani armed forces.”

The same was emphasized by a respondent from Martuni:

“We simply noticed their movement, their approach towards the borders, the movement of their equipment and personnel.”

The increased activity of drones also signaled the approaching danger to people. A resident of Stepanakert stated:

“Unmanned aerial vehicles were constantly coming, checking; we were afraid.”

The role of the peacekeeping forces in this process of preparing for the attack was particularly problematic.

Thus, a resident of Aygestan village in the Askeran region, who served in the Artakh air defense, notes:

“The Russian general came to the Noragyugh post together with the Turkish general. They were thoroughly studying our defense positions.

Seven people came, in an UAZ. That one I knew was a Turk. I recognized him by his face. And the Russian says that among us there are people of every nationality.”

The Start of the Attack and the Course of Military Operations

The military operations that began on September 19, 2023, between approximately 13:00 and 13:30, differed significantly in scale and organization from all previous clashes. The attack was carried out through simultaneous strikes in multiple directions.

1. First phase (13:00–14:30)

- Destruction of Artsakh’s telecommunications hubs and air defense systems.
- Use of UAVs conducting deep reconnaissance.
- Concentrated artillery strikes toward administrative centers.

2. Second phase (14:30–17:00)

- Penetration of Azerbaijani units into Artsakh’s defensive lines.
- In parallel, destruction of military and civilian infrastructure.
- Intensification of psychological pressure operations.

3. Third phase (17:00–19:00)

- Consolidation of control over territories.
- Blocking of evacuation routes for the civilian population.

Descriptions of the first minutes of the attack in residents' testimonies are as follows:

"Smoke, explosions, fire from all sides. While at home, suddenly a piercing sound was heard, then several explosions at once."

The testimony of the head of the Vardadzor village community in the Martakert region is as follows:

"It was shelled, Smerch (Russian for "tornado") also hit, I personally saw it. I saw smoke rise, came and saw that people were in their basements."

A resident of Nerkin Sznek recounted:

"Initially, those barrages were primarily toward the positions—our Armenian strongholds. Before our eyes, we saw that they were completely destroying our strongholds, because those shots were extremely precise."

Personally, during observation I noticed that five armored vehicles were stationed nearby - tanks and BMPs. It became clear that this was a war."

During the military operations, a particularly severe situation developed in the Martakert and Askeran regions, where the Azerbaijani armed forces employed:

- D-20 and D-30 howitzers (152 mm and 122 mm caliber),
- Grad rocket systems,
- 100 mm anti-tank guns,
- Smerch multiple-launch rocket systems,
- Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 UAVs.

Prior to the attack, residents in border settlements began to self-organize, creating local self-defense groups that were mainly armed with light small arms.

In many villages, residents organized self-defense. A resident of the village of Nerkin Sznek in the Askeran region recounts:

"By resisting, they reached to within 10–20 meters of our house, and from there they began to defend the village."

The head of the village of Kaghartsi in the Martuni region states:

"There were 18 riflemen, I was commanding 18 people. We were holding the primary positions outside the village."

Nevertheless, local self-defense structures were unable to effectively replace regular defense systems, and their resistance did not have a sustained character.

“We went up and already saw that our posts were gone. We organized to get all the population out of the houses; they were already close, we couldn’t hold them with a 1-to-20 ratio - our hands had only automatic rifles.”

A resident of the village of Sarushen in the Askeran region notes:

“My ammunition had run low; each of us had 2–3 magazines of cartridges. At that moment they called from post 311 asking what had happened; I said the Turks are in the ravine, the cartridges are few. Two people brought cartridges from there, and one grenade. I said, well, you go back to your post, we will hold our ravine so that it can be held. They went to their post; those [the enemy] fired several more times.”

There are many similar testimonies to the above, especially concerning cases where areas were defended by militia forces, moving from place to place.

Many Artsakh residents reported casualties suffered by the militia forces of their villages. For example, a resident of the village of Sarushen in the Askeran region stated that their village suffered 10 fatalities. Such information covers the entirety of Artsakh.

The Psychological effect (especially on children)

Artsakh residents, almost without exception, had. A relative, friend, or acquaintance serving in the army and performing combat duty. At the moment of the attack, in addition to thinking about their own safety, they were also deeply worried about these individuals. At times, contradictory information was received, which further heightened an already tense situation.

At the start of the September 19 attack, many children were at schools. For this reason, many Artsakh residents, risking their lives, went to bring their children home.

A resident of the village of Aygestan in the Askeran region notes:

“We forced our way to the school, took the children. I say, ‘Run, go to the neighbor’s basement.’ The children go to the neighbor’s basement.”

A resident of the village of Kusapat in the Martakert region stated:

“The children were in class that day. My younger son climbed out through the window.”

Some of the children were on their way home from school at the moment the shelling began, which involved additional security risks.

“It was a terrible situation. I don’t know what was happening to me. You know, you might say, ‘Alright, okay.’ But if you are inside it, at that moment you are no longer thinking about yourself but about your child. You say, ‘Oh God, let nothing happen.’”

The head of the community of Mets Shen village in the Martakert region notes that 15 shells fell within the village. He saw two UAVs in the village, one of which blew up the telecommunications tower. There were no casualties from the shelling, but the respondent emphasizes that the children remained traumatized for a long time:

“Even now (he means after having already moved to Armenia – ed.), when you ask that little child, ‘Are you going to kindergarten?’ he says, ‘No, I’m going to the village kindergarten.’ You feel oppressed that you are not in your birthplace, on your own land.”

“To this day, when children recall the day of the attack, they become afraid.”

A resident of the city of Martuni worked as a kindergarten teacher. According to her, some of the children were asleep at the time of the attack:

“Even now I feel the heaviness in my legs, how those 35 little ones were screaming, calling out, ‘Teacher Ruzan, I want my mommy, Teacher Ruzan, I’m scared.’ Barefoot, half-dressed, half-naked, we took those children down to the basement. We didn’t understand what was happening.”

The sounds of explosions and gunfire were periodically heard in the kindergarten basement. The children were convinced that these were sounds of thunder and that there was no need to be afraid.

The teacher also recalls how a shell fell in front of the kindergarten entrance. From the force of the impact, the building’s windows shattered, the basement door opened, and shards of glass filled the basement corridor.

A resident of the village of Nerkin Horatagh in the Martakert region, who had been a serviceman and participated in the September 19 confrontation, also notes that his children (5 children, of whom 3 are minors, and one has a disability) to this day become frightened when recalling the day of the attack, as their house was shaken by the first strikes.

4. Shelter conditions for the civilian population during the September 19 attack

At the start of the military operations on September 19, the population of Artsakh was forced to seek shelter in various locations, depending on possibilities and accessibility. For the most part, people remained in shelters until September 25.

In the very first moments of the war, many were taken by surprise and hurriedly searched for places of shelter. This situation led to residents often sheltering as families or in small groups, since not everyone was able to gather in organized shelters.

A resident of the village of Chankatagh in the Martakert region stated:

“We ran to the school basement. We stayed in the basements for 3 hours.”

In the village of Karahunj in the Martuni region, the situation was more chaotic:

“Half ran into the forests, half fled somewhere else.”

In some cases, basements were unsuitable for shelter - they were in poor condition or filled with stored goods, which forced people to look for other evacuation options.

For example, a resident of the city of Chartar stated that he moved his family to another settlement, Verin Chartar, because there was a basement there with adequate conditions. Some people did not go to shelters out of fear:

“I didn’t go down to a shelter like that, because I was alone and afraid.”

There were also those who refused to take shelter for various personal reasons:

“To be honest, my mother and father have a somewhat different mindset. They did not go down to the basement at all during the entire war; they spent the entire war sitting on the balcony.”

Types of shelters

The first shelters² were mainly private basements or those of neighbors. In addition, people used dormitories, basements of administrative buildings, schools, hospitals, and even forests, garages, and chicken coops.

In the village of Nakhijevanik in the Askeran region, where there were no shelters, people took refuge under trees:

² The places and buildings that were urgently used as shelters during the first hours of the attack.

“It was an old village, and it had no shelters; we stayed under the trees.”

In the Martakert region, even a chicken coop was used as a shelter:

“A chicken coop with walls, where 20 people stayed.”

“There was a shed, some structure, trees in the yard. So they went under that shed.”

In the village of Haterk in the Martakert region, a neighbor’s garage served as a shelter, which.

“...was open and cold. The children were freezing.”

In some cases, houses themselves served as shelters:

“We went into the house next to ours, what we call a dugout, an old house, with a stone-built arched second floor.”

The basements of buildings in Stepanakert had large areas:

“Up to 100 meters in length and 10–12 meters in width, where up to 150 people took shelter.”

Living conditions in shelters

Most shelters did not meet safety and comfort requirements. People were forced to take blankets, benches, and other necessary items with them. Many sat on the ground or used makeshift furniture.

In one of the schools in the city of Martakert, where 80–90 people had taken shelter, there was only one bench.

A respondent from the village of Badara noted that their shelter was like a barn. The conditions in the shelter of a school in the city of Martuni were harsh:

“This was just dry ground, concrete. You had to go, put some piece of clothing under you, and sit. You couldn’t lie down, you couldn’t really do anything.”

In some shelters, dampness and cold were serious problems:

“The basement of a five-story building was very cold.”

There were also exceptions. For example, in the village of Kusapat in the Martakert region, the shelter had been prepared in advance and had relatively good conditions.

Most shelters were not equipped with sanitary facilities.

A resident of Stepanakert noted:

“We were dragging our patients and elderly people to the toilet on the third floor of the building and then bringing them back.”

Area of shelters

The sizes of the shelter spaces and the number of residents taking shelter in them varied greatly. It was often noted that there were between 10 and 20 people in shelters. In the five rooms of a school in the town of Askeran, 200 people took shelter.

The basement of the village of Astghashen in the Askeran region was newly built, and in that space of 88 sq. m., 25–30 people took shelter. In the village of Badara, 12 people stayed in a basement of about 6 sq. m.

In the village of Zaglik in the Martakert region, 20–25 people stayed in a 20 sq. m. space; in Paravatumb, 12–13 people in a 20 sq. m. space; in the village of Sos, about 30 people in a 20 sq. m. space. In the village of Kaghartsi in the Martuni region, 30 people took shelter in a 24 sq. m. space, and in one house in Kolkhozashen, 15 people in a 20 sq. m. space. In the city of Chartar, 30–35 people took shelter in a small house.

Food and water

The shortage of food was acutely felt in shelters. People risked their lives to obtain food. Bringing food was associated with danger. A resident of Stepanakert noted:

“When the sounds died down a bit, we would run upstairs like that, grab something, and bring it back.”

Many shared the supplies they had with one another. In the village of Ivanyan in the Askeran region, food was distributed collectively:

“The head of the hospital cafeteria provided food to the people, to everyone.”

In the village of Zaglik in the Martakert region, residents organized mutual assistance:

“The villagers put together bags - each for their relatives. I took them, distributed them, and came back.”

In several places, the lack of food had a negative impact on people's health and led to fainting, for example in the village of Chankatagh in the Martakert region.

The problem of water shortage was resolved relatively easily thanks to nearby springs.

Electricity and communications

As a result of the attacks, many settlements were left without electricity and internet. People lit shelters with candles or rechargeable flashlights. A resident of Stepanakert described:

"We took out candles, and the candles ran out too. At some point we started leaving the outer door open, so that there would at least be a little light."

Telephone communication was very poor in the initial period, and people were unable to contact their relatives. A resident of the village of Lusadzor in the Askeran region noted:

"I would go out of the basement and catch an internet connection. SMS messages were coming in, everyone was writing to me. Since I couldn't reply to each one individually, I would post status updates - asking how things were."

Medical assistance

Medical assistance was limited due to the shortage of medications and specialists. People tried to help one another or resorted to self-treatment. A resident of the village of Lusadzor in the Askeran region recounted:

"A woman became unwell several times because her son was on duty at a post and she could not get in touch with him. Everyone helped in some way, brought medicines down to the basement, and gave valerian."

The need to move between shelters

Due to inadequate living and safety conditions in shelters, people were forced to regularly change places of refuge, exposing themselves to security risks during movement.

A resident of the village of Aygestan in the Askeran region noted that they covered a distance of about 2 km to go to acquaintances, at a time when bombs were "passing over their heads." A resident of the village of Lusadzor stated:

"We stayed in the basement of our building for a few hours, saw that it was getting worse, the sounds were coming closer, and we moved to the basement of my mother-in-law's building."

A resident of the city of Martakert stated:

“At first we went to the administrative building, to the first floor. Then they told us to leave there because the flag was raised and it was dangerous. We stayed for a few hours, then they gave an order to leave. After that we went to the school basement.

When leaving the first basement there was shooting; we came out under that fire and ran into the school basement. We ran quite a distance on foot—such terror, such running, out of breath.”

Safety conditions of shelters

Most places of refuge lacked even basic safety conditions. In some cases, people were forced to take shelter in partially destroyed buildings or basements that had no concrete foundation or ventilation system. A resident of the village of Sos in the Martuni region recalled:

“I didn’t even know how to calm the children. I lied, saying that our house was safe, all concrete, when in reality it wasn’t like that.”

Some residents tried to reinforce shelters on their own: they used car tires, wooden shields, or furniture, but these could not protect against powerful strikes. “Our house was dangerous too; it was an old house. When the sounds came, the house shook; they were striking nearby, and the second strike already hit inside the village. Right in front of our house there was a hill, and behind the hill it was them.”

Security risks during sheltering

Many were forced to periodically leave shelters to obtain water or food, which often turned into a life-threatening ordeal. A resident of the village of Aygestan in the Askeran region recalled: “We would go out to catch a phone signal somewhere, to have a connection, and it would pass over our heads (the respondent means unmanned aerial vehicles – ed.). A terrible thing. There has been war, but it had never been like this last one.”

Residents of the village of Chankatagh in the Martakert region tried to leave the shelter, but it did not work: “When we tried to go out, they fired. It probably fell near the club, because the whole house was in I don’t know what state. Frightened, we went back inside, stayed about 10 minutes, then an officer came and said, ‘Don’t move, turn off all phones and anything else. Your life is important.’ We held the children by the hand.”

The same was testified to by a resident of the village of Maghavuz: “If you go out, they might bake you, kill you. No one went out.”

Despite the danger, a resident of the village of Chldran went out of the shelter to make a call: “To be honest, I was going out. They were shouting at me, but I was going out just to find at least some connection, to call my husband, to know what was happening or at least hear his voice, to see what condition he was in.”

According to the testimony of one respondent, a resident of the city of Martuni was killed precisely because he left the shelter, thinking that at that moment he might manage to bring water: “...he looked, at that moment there was nothing, said, ‘That’s it,’ stood up and went, saying there’s no water.”

In one case in Stepanakert, a bomb hit a youth center, and only by chance were there no casualties: “The Euro-windows were all destroyed. The children collected so many fragments from inside the Center. There’s a shop next to it; the shop’s refrigerators were completely smashed. That refrigerator held it; one was placed right near our door, it took the whole impact on itself (the respondent means the force and blast wave – ed.). That saved us; if it hadn’t been there, it would have swept much more.”

Another city resident noted: “Such large shells (artillery rounds – ed.) were lying in that stadium - the metal fragments... Or the condition of the Culture Center, when I saw it—no one would have survived.”

The sound of unmanned aerial vehicles became one of the most distressing factors of the war affecting people. Their sudden appearance and bombardments created an atmosphere of constant tension.

“The unmanned aerial vehicle keeps circling.” “The buzzing sound that comes - we hear that. We no longer know where to go.”

It was especially terrifying that it was impossible to predict when and where they would strike. A resident of the village of Chankatagh in the Martakert region recounted how UAVs bombed the outskirts of the village every five minutes.

Even after the ceasefire was established, residents continued to remain in shelters, suspecting that the adversary might violate it again. The main reasons for anxiety were fear for the safety of children and distrust toward Azerbaijanis.

A respondent from the village of Astghashen in the Askeran region noted: “Anyway, you can’t trust it; they might say there’s a ceasefire, but they could come from here, from there. You’re constantly in fear.”

According to a resident of the village of Ivanyan in the Askeran region: “Well, at any moment it was possible that they would strike. Anything was to be expected from them.”

This fear intensified further when information spread about the approach of Azerbaijani forces. A resident of the village of Badara recounted: “They came, sealed the warehouse, saying it was theirs. They said, ‘We are already here.’”

People’s psychological state in shelters

In shelters, people were in a severe psychological state, living in constant fear and anxiety. Children had an especially hard time enduring this situation. A resident of the village of

Aygestan in the Askeran region noted:

“My little one cried a lot out of fear; I brought a doll and gave it to her so she would be quiet.”

The evacuation of children at a kindergarten in the city of Martuni was traumatic:

“We did not go down with the parents; the caregivers went down with the nannies. We brought down blankets and things and urgently covered them. We were also trying to calm them, because all the children - 100 children - started crying and shaking, because we woke them from sleep; barefoot, with nothing on, half-naked, we took them down to the basement.”

A resident of Martakert noted:

“They came and told us that Azerbaijanis had entered Martakert. Right there I became short of breath and said, God forbid, they will come and enter the basement and slaughter all of us here.

I said, we have neither that many troops nor anything at all; they have everything, we are a defeated nation. I thought they would come and massacre us.”

A resident of the village of Kolkhozashen in the Martuni region noted:

“The women were crying; we were saying, don’t cry, encouraging one another, saying that it should probably be okay.”

5. Evacuation of the civilian population in September 2023

Circumstances of leaving shelters in September

The process of the civilian population leaving shelters was complex and problematic, due to changes in the military situation and the lack of a sense of security and safety. This process unfolded differently in different localities, having both common and specific characteristics.

During ceasefires, a significant portion of the population left shelters, temporarily returning to their homes. However, when fighting resumed, people were again forced to seek shelter. Women and children remained in shelters for longer periods, while men often went out to continue household tasks or defensive work.

In some cases, shelters became temporary places of residence, as essential means of living were absent in homes.

“If I went home, there was already no gas, no electricity. There is a stove set up in the garages; we brought all the food from our house to the garage. We ate there, kneaded dough there, if there was flour.”

Even after leaving shelters, residents were forced to constantly move, trying to find a safe place:

“After leaving the shelter, they went to the airport, returned home the same day, stayed at home for a few days, and on the 25th headed to Armenia.”

Organization of the evacuation

The evacuation was mainly initiated by representatives of the local authorities—the heads of communities. Despite the initiative, not in all cases were residents provided with direct and effective assistance.

“They called and said, whoever can, should leave with whatever they have.”

“The village head said that everyone must leave, because afterward the army would be withdrawn. I cried there; I realized that the army was being dispersed, and it was clear that we would not return.”

In some settlements, the hasty and panic-driven evacuation was caused by the advance of Azerbaijani forces. Residents were forced to urgently leave their settlements:

“Our village had a lake; we were on the other shore of the lake. The Turks had already taken Getavan, reached Drmbon; there was only one road left for us to come by the dam. They had reached below Haterk; there was already no way.”

Widespread rumors that Azerbaijanis might close evacuation routes prompted people to act hastily:

“They were saying (how true it is, I don’t know) that the Azerbaijanis need a number - 100, 200, or 1000; they record that number. There was both a microphone and a camera; they were registering people. If that number was reached on their side, they would close the road. That’s why people left immediately.”

Obstacles to transportation movement

One of the main difficulties of evacuation was the lack of transport or its unsuitable conditions.

“It was an Ural, very high; they lowered the step so we could climb in. I don’t remember how we squeezed in; there was no space - roughly speaking, like potatoes, piled on top of each other.”

In many cases, residents used neighbors’ or relatives’ private vehicles for evacuation:

“We have a neighbor with a minibus. He gave us, the neighbors, everyone, the car and took us to the airport.”

A resident of Sos village in the Martuni region transported 20 people in his 8-seat vehicle.

In some villages, the lack of vehicles or fuel forced people to walk long distances. Residents of Herher in the Martuni region, Nerkin Sznek in the Askeran region, and Chldran village in the Martakert region left their settlements on foot.

“A 94-year-old woman was with us; can you imagine - through thickets, forest, bushes, I don’t know, woodlands, with walking sticks, we reached there; it was already evening.”

The lack of fuel was a significant obstacle to evacuation.

“Taking from one another (gasoline - ed.), using gas and such, with great difficulty we reached Stepanakert. There were 8–9 people in each car. That’s how we were lying on top of each other.”

“The village head of Zaglik village in the Martakert region himself distributed gasoline, giving 5–6 liters to each.”

Road congestion significantly prolonged the duration of evacuation. Some residents of Nngi village reached Stepanakert in 6 hours instead of the usual 25 minutes.

“From Kolkhozashen village in the Martuni region to Stepanakert (the distance is about 35 km - ed.) it took an entire night - 9 hours - due to traffic jams.”

Due to control established by Azerbaijani forces on certain roads, residents were forced to use bypass routes.

Psychological and emotional difficulties

The evacuation process was accompanied by severe emotional states, uncertainty, and fear. Residents often did not know where they were going or what awaited them:

“While going to the airport (of Stepanakert – ed.), we did not understand why we were going. Whether we should stay in the city or whether we should go - we did not know.”

During the evacuation, many witnessed bombings and artillery shelling, which had a terrifying impact:

“...they are firing directly at that artillery. We all understand that that’s it - everyone who is near that equipment is no longer alive.”

A resident of Karmir village in the Askeran region stated:

“My husband keeps spinning in my head - how, is it possible that he might not be alive? Under those impressions, I leave him and go. I have always told him that no matter what happens, I will always wait for you at home.”

Security issues during the evacuation

Ensuring security during the evacuation process was the most difficult and unresolved issue. The presence of Azerbaijani forces along evacuation routes created both physical and psychological threats.

“They have automatic weapons in their hands; the children are afraid. Well, I’m afraid too. You could go out and they might kill you.”

There were also direct attacks against evacuating civilians:

“They fired at our buses, at the people. When you pass the intersection, they see you and fire.”

“About three civilian cars came, moved toward that intersection, and were subjected to gunfire.”

Those coming from Spitakashen village were stopped three times:

“They spoke in a different tone and held weapons, tried to shoot or load them.”

The respondent notes that in the above situation they lowered the car window, and everything calmed down. The same respondent added that they asked his father which Armenian is the best Armenian; his father said he did not know, to which they replied that it is “the Armenian in a dead state.”

Another similar situation is as follows:

“My husband’s uncle’s son’s trunk would not open; they said ‘open it,’ he said ‘I can’t,’ they aimed a weapon at him. The children shouted from inside, and only then did the Russians come closer.”

A resident of Martakert city recounted:

“My brother, when he drove the car a little above Drmbon, the Turks were already attacking, they wanted to shoot at the car. There was no peacekeeper to escort us, nor... My brother said, ‘Oh no, it looks like Turks. What should I do—stop the car?’ I said, ‘No, drive - whatever happens, will happen.’”

A dangerous situation also arose on the road from Zaglik village in Martakert to Stepanakert, on the section from Kichan to Balujja. The severity of the danger is evidenced by the fact that one brother said to the other:

“Wait, let me go through first so that everyone gets through; then you come, so that we don’t go one after the other. I took my children and passed; afterward, if they had already shot, they would see (the other members of the evacuating group, to know whether it is safe or not – ed.).”

Evacuation routes were subjected to regular artillery shelling:

“All the time the road was being rocketed and shelled.”

“The shell passes over your head. We all realized it passed - where did it go. Everyone was terrified.”

Twenty to thirty people being evacuated from Chankatagh village in Martakert in a Ford vehicle narrowly escaped artillery shelling by chance:

“A large shell came and passed in front of the car’s windshield.”

In order not to become a targeted object of shelling and gunfire, those evacuating from Karmir Shuka village moved in a zigzag pattern.

Especially vulnerable and unprotected were those evacuating on foot, without transport:

“A person was walking on foot, they shot him.”

Security-related incidents were most pronounced in the Drmbon area:

“In Drmbon, the Russians were on the road, and on the other side there were Turks. The Russians pushed us back and said, ‘Hurry through, they are closing the road.’”

Even after evacuation from their own settlements, security problems did not subside. For example, one respondent evacuated to the capital Stepanakert stated:

“There were Turkish posts near Shushi, right there, with fire burning like that. From there, they rolled tires down toward Stepanakert.

They were coming in columns, swearing, gesturing like this, passing by us; one said, ‘If you stay, we will slaughter you - get out.’”

“Turks were just a few meters away; they came and went.”

Access to medical assistance during the evacuation was extremely limited. Civilians mainly relied on mutual aid and self-treatment.

Even in cases of severe injuries, assistance was minimal:

“They only lightly bandaged it, because the situation was not such that they could call a doctor from somewhere.”

After the evacuation, those who remained in villages were mainly the elderly, people living alone, and those with health problems. Among them there were also cases of capture:

“A roughly 90-year-old woman from Karmir village was captured by the Azerbaijanis because she was unable to walk on foot.”

After some time, the captured woman was released; however, she is still frightened, and “...every moment, when the door opens, she says, ‘Have the Turks entered? Have the Turks entered?’”

In Kusapat village of the Martakert region, one person did not want to leave the settlement and waited for a relative. Later, when the Azerbaijanis had already captured the settlement, he was found dead. How his death occurred is unknown.

Checks carried out by the Azerbaijani armed forces and the humiliation of civilians

The Azerbaijani armed forces stopped evacuees’ vehicles and conducted detailed inspections, searching them.

Azerbaijanis sometimes confiscated personal belongings. In the case presented below, a cross was taken from an evacuee, which may also be regarded as persecution on religious grounds:

“They took off the gold cross. There is a guy coming from Martuni to Stepanakert; before reaching Stepanakert it was hanging on him, on his chest, they took it off.”

The Azerbaijani armed forces applied methods of psychological pressure, for example by forcing civilians to pronounce the Azerbaijani place names of their settlements:

“When they said Martuni, they said ‘Khojavend.’ They forced the Artsakh Armenians to say that name as well.”

“They were saying, ‘Go away, you are bad people,’ they said a few disgusting things. They constantly wanted to demean and mock the people.”

A man evacuated from Arajadzor village in the Martakert region stated:

“They were making gestures with their hands and things, swearing.”

From another car, the Azerbaijanis took a military sleeping bag, after which they began beating the driver. In the end, they pushed him back into the car, saying: “Orash armani.”

According to respondents, it was obvious that the Azerbaijanis’ aim was for the people of Artsakh to leave their settlements as quickly as possible and later Artsakh as well. For this purpose, they even “assisted” the evacuees.

A resident of Kolkhozashen village in the Martuni region stated:

“It happened that the opponent helped - there was even no battery, they pushed the car or towed it, started it, or there was no water and they gave water. They said, ‘Just get out, leave.’”

Children’s vulnerability and the dangers threatening them during evacuation

During evacuation, children were especially vulnerable, which manifested in severe emotional states and experiences. Children were particularly frightened by the sounds of military operations.

“The shell was hitting, the children were crying.”

“Every time they saw a light, they said, ‘It’s probably a Turk.’”

Cases were recorded in which children were subjected to direct attacks and were injured:

“His grandchild runs toward the Red Cross or whatever it was to tell the doctors to come look at his grandfather; they shoot at the child. They shoot that small child; he is wounded in the leg.”

The role of Russian peacekeepers

In some cases, Russian peacekeepers ensured comparatively safe evacuation by accompanying evacuees through the most dangerous sections. At times, they prevented possible attacks by Azerbaijanis.

“When Russian peacekeepers transported residents, it was safe.”

“The Russians approached and prevented further violence.”

Conditions for accommodating people at Stepanakert airport after evacuation

Stepanakert airport became the main shelter for the evacuated population during the period from September 19 to 26. Tens of thousands of people were accommodated there, living in extremely difficult conditions.

Each tent installed by the Russian peacekeepers accommodated 100–120 people. Generators were placed next to the tents, providing electricity for 3 hours a day. The electricity was used to charge phones and prepare food.

The tents provided shelter, but inadequate living conditions:

“There was linoleum on the tent floor, but you could feel the stones under your feet.”

“There were two-tier metal beds, but not everyone got one.”

People who could not fit into the tents were forced to settle near the airport runway, spending the night under the open sky and without any proper conditions:

“They sat on the ground, sleeping among the grass with blankets spread out.”

“It was even raining on us.”

“It was an open area - cold, wind, chaotic conditions, hungry people, no food.”

Food distribution at the airport was not properly organized and was irregular:

“The Russian spoke harshly, said, ‘We have a canteen, one for you.’ They lined us up like kindergarten children.”

“It’s the second day; I found a small piece of bread like this and divided it into two.”

“We took water from one another. It was a completely gypsy-like life.”

“There was a spring, but the lines were huge.”

Conditions for accommodating people in various shelters in Stepanakert after evacuation

Many individuals evacuated to the capital Stepanakert were accommodated in public school buildings, where basic living conditions were not ensured:

“By joining chairs together, they made beds in many places.”

“We shared one loaf of bread among four people; they gave one can of stew for four people.”

“Seventy people - from two villages - sleeping on the floor.”

Some of the population took shelter in the building of Artsakh State University: “It was cold; half of the children slept on chairs, half on the floor.”

“All the people were crying, saying, ‘A shell will come here.’”

There were also cases of taking shelter in various shops (for example, furniture stores). For instance, in one shop, about 300–400 people found shelter in an area of 150–200 square meters.

Space was also insufficient for people sheltering in basements:

“Twenty people in 15 square meters, thirty people in 25 square meters.”

“People sat in turns to get a little rest.” “We sat all night; there was no place to sleep.”

“It was terribly cold, damp.”

Many spent the night in nearby forests and even in cars:

“Residents of the Martuni region spent the night in the forest.”

“It was a small house; I stayed in the car.”

Respondents often mentioned the low quality of the water:

“The water was undrinkable - smelled of silt, soil was coming with the water.”

6. Consequences of the September 2023 attack for life and health

Civilian casualties as a result of hostilities

During the military operations of September 2023, numerous civilian casualties were recorded, mainly as a result of shelling. Below are descriptions of cases based on information obtained from interviews, including available details about the victims and eyewitness testimonies.

A woman resident of Askeran recounted that during the attack she went with her neighbor to bake bread for the family and witnessed the death of another person as a result of shelling.

“We went back to our house, my neighbor and I, baked bread, and the son of our shopkeeper was killed.”

In Badara village, a woman named Gayane was killed when she left the shelter to bring bread and other food. From the impact of a shell, she struck her head on a stone, fell into a coma, and died; they did not manage to transport her to Stepanakert.

“That woman stayed at home for four days like that... the ambulance came to take her to Stepanakert, she died on the way...”

After Azerbaijani forces established control, three civilian vehicles from Sarushen village attempted to pass through the Khachmach village crossroads. They were fired upon, resulting in fatalities and injuries.

Among the deceased was 73-year-old Shabo Grigoryan, whose body was later returned through the Red Cross.

“Three civilian vehicles came, moved, were subjected to gunfire... it was my friend’s father... Shabo Grigoryan... they brought him to Stepanakert through the Red Cross.”

During the same incident, Karen Grigoryan, the respondent’s friend, was also killed.

In Gandzasar village, a house was shelled. One of the family members, named Marcel, died on the spot. They were unable to remove the body and buried him right in the yard of the house.

“They couldn’t even take the body out; they buried him in their own yard.”

In Martakert, Rita and Karlen were killed while seeking shelter. Their bodies were not buried due to the intensity of the shelling.

Another resident of Martuni recounted that a woman was killed near their place of residence as a result of shelling.

In Martuni, a man was killed at the very beginning of the shelling. A shell fell approximately 2–3 meters away from him.

“Right when the fighting started at 1 o’clock... the shell fell, and that man was killed there.”

One of the most notable cases in Martuni was the death of taxi driver Arnold Chalyan, aged 72, in front of the Sayat-Nova complex in central Martuni. He had left the shelter to take bread when a shell fell right next to him.

The incident occurred on September 20. He was buried on September 22 or 23 in Martuni.

“On the road, standing on the sidewalk, the shell fell, he died, his neck was severed... his daughter also served in the Ministry of Emergency Situations.”

Rita Balayan, a resident of Stepanakert, was killed while trying to flee to a shelter. From the shell explosion she lost her balance, fell, and died. Her relatives found her body in the morgue.

There were cases where death or injury occurred not as a direct result of shelling, gunfire, or direct contact with Azerbaijani forces, but due to indirect factors. These cases were caused by deterioration of health, the effects of fear, or injuries sustained while fleeing. Children were most often affected.

According to testimonies, in the city of Martuni one child died of cardiac arrest due to fear.

“A 5th-grade child from the First School had his heart stop from fear.”

A similar case was also recorded at School No. 9 in Stepanakert. Several respondents mentioned this incident, noting that a child died of fear at school.

In another case, teachers sent children home, but on the way a child named Gor died of fear.

“The teachers let the children go home, and on the way the child died of fear.”

Premeditated killings by Azerbaijani forces

This section of the report presents killings of civilians by Azerbaijani forces that occurred not as a result of shelling, but due to direct and premeditated actions.

One respondent recalls learning at the airport about a beheaded person who had moved from Sghnakh village of Shushi to Askeran and lived near the church. The beheaded person's name was Vrej, and his mother's surname was Stepanyan.

"At the airport they say, 'Do you know so-and-so's parent?' I say, 'Yes, of course.' They say, 'They cut off his head...' the boy was also sick, they say he was left in his mother's care when they cut off his head."

Artyusha Mikayelyan from Nerkin Sznek village was found dead with bodily injuries. He was transported from near Khachmach and Karmir village.

A forensic examination determined that the cause of death was a stab-and-cutting weapon injury. Although some data indicate the possibility of natural death ("he also had a heart defect, had a pacemaker or something..."), blunt-force and gunshot injuries are also mentioned.

"It turns out it was an elderly fellow villager named Artyusha Mikayelyan... the forensic result showed that he was struck with a cutting and piercing weapon. He had been shot at and had some blunt injuries."

One respondent stated that Azerbaijanis killed a person who was traveling toward Martakert, but it is unclear whether he was a military serviceman or a civilian.

"The Azerbaijanis killed a man going to Martakert, but it's not clear whether he had an automatic weapon in his hands or not."

A shepherd who remained in Martuni, named Martik or Martin, was killed while bringing in sheep.

Another respondent described a case in which a woman, unwilling to leave her home, remained in a village under Azerbaijani control. The next day she was found raped and killed.

"They saw that the woman was naked, raped, slaughtered, thrown in the center of the building. This is a 100 percent confirmed case."

A resident of Askeran recounted that in Nakhijevanik, two children were killed simultaneously by gunfire. Their parent, Zarine, had been preparing in time to move to a safe place but did not manage to do so. According to the respondent, their shelter was one of the abandoned houses in Aghbulagh.

In another case, it is noted that teachers did not manage to take the children down to the basement. A shell fell on the school grounds, resulting in injuries and fatalities.

“When they shelled the school, the teachers did not take the children to the basement... the shell fell there. There were both wounded and killed.”

Two schoolchildren died when, during shelling, they hid under a tree. The shell exploded right next to the tree. They were later buried in Armenia, in the city of Masis.

Their mother, Zhenya, survived.

“They told the children, ‘Go hide under that tree’... the shell came and exploded right under the tree... they were buried in Masis... the mother’s name was Zhenya.”

During one of the attacks on Stepanakert, a child was killed when Azerbaijani forces approached the lower positions of Krkzhan.

Several respondents stated that in Sarushen village a person was slaughtered.

Organization of funerals

After the end of the military operations, the burial of bodies was organized under emergency conditions.

One of the representatives of the Martuni administration describes the course of the organizational work.

“We go, arrange the coffins, help, leave them there, and they start making them (meaning the preparation of coffins – ed.).”

In Martuni, the school gymnasium was used to store bodies, and local craftsmen were involved in making coffins.

“We chose School No. 1’s gymnasium... we gathered all the carpenters and furniture makers... we dismantled the curtain of the Palace of Culture for the lining of the coffins.”

Wounded civilians

In September 2023, many civilians were injured as a result of shelling.

Gegham, the driver of the minibus serving the village of Sos, went to the garage to take out the vehicle in order to participate in the evacuation. At that moment, a shell exploded near the garage, and he was wounded. He was taken to Stepanakert, where he received medical assistance.

In the same village, Gegham’s father, history teacher Hamlet Gasparyan, was killed as a result of shelling.

Another case occurred in Martakert: a wounded civilian was transported to Yerevan by helicopter.

A resident of the village of Dahrav stated that his brother's wife was wounded in the leg by a shell fragment.

"It was my brother's wife; a fragment entered her leg. They are now in Yerevan."

On the road to Martakert, another woman was wounded by gunfire directed at the vehicle, sustaining an injury to her arm. She was immediately taken to Martakert and then to the Erebuni Hospital in Yerevan.

In the village of Nerkin Horatagh, as a result of a shell explosion, a grandmother and her 10-year-old grandchild were wounded.

In the village of Verin Chartar, a bomb fell near a vehicle, as a result of which Ruzan Sahakyan was wounded. She was first taken to the Chartar hospital, then to medical facilities in Martuni and Stepanakert.

In Martuni, mass injuries were recorded. Many people were injured by shell fragments.

According to one respondent, their number reached up to 10–15. One of the respondents spoke about her mother-in-law, who was wounded during the shelling: her nose was injured.

"My mother-in-law was also there during that time... she lost consciousness. Her nose was almost broken. Thank God it healed quickly."

Another woman, Arevik Sahakyan, who was transported to Stepanakert for surgery, was wounded by a shell fragment. Her internal organs were damaged. The surgery continued in Yerevan.

"A fragment fell next to a woman. They looked and saw that the fragment had entered and damaged all the organs. They operated... Arevik Sahakyan."

There are also general testimonies regarding wounded persons. These general references are often without specific data, and on their basis it is difficult to identify the incidents and individuals.

For example, several respondents noted that there were wounded people in neighboring settlements, without specifying their names.

"There were wounded in villages near the border."

"There were cases in the neighboring village, in Harav village, in Norshen."

In Kusapat village, as a result of shelling, a house was destroyed, as a result of which two women were wounded. They did not receive medical assistance. The next day they left the village.

“The house was blown apart. The fragments scattered... hit them. No medical assistance was provided.”

There were cases where individuals sustained injuries or their health condition deteriorated not due to the direct impact of hostilities, but due to indirect factors.

For example, a child fainted. In another case, panic caused by the hostilities led to injuries to another child:

“That artillery shell did not hit him. But on the way down to the basement, because he was running, he fell and broke his leg.”

Indirect testimonies of violence

There are indirect testimonies (retellings of information reported by other persons) indicating that Azerbaijani forces, while entering various settlements of Artsakh, at times committed acts of violence against the civilian population.

For example, one resident of Stepanakert stated that Azerbaijanis first tied up his acquaintance and then released him, assuring him that they would not harm him.

“He said that at first the Turks took him and tied him up. Then they released him and said, ‘We will not touch you.’”

In the village of Jankatagh, a family - a mother and her son - remained in the village. The boy's name is Vladimir, and the mother's name is Araksya. The Azerbaijanis took them away and then, after interrogation, returned them to the Russian peacekeepers. Their past residence in Baku (during the Soviet period) likely played a role in their return.

“They didn't manage to leave and stayed in the house. The Turks came, caught them, and took them away - supposedly to slaughter them. They had lived in Baku. He started speaking Turkish and Russian, said that his mother had been in Baku, that they were born there, and so on. Then they brought them back home, didn't touch them, asked whether there were weapons or servicemen in the household, he said no. They brought them and handed them over to the Russians.”

Limitations of medical assistance during hostilities

During the September attack, the provision of medical assistance was extremely limited, especially for the civilian population. Assistance was provided primarily to military personnel.

One resident of Chartar city in the Martuni district described the overload of the medical system.

“I often felt unwell, but the village therapist, Hasmik Agramanyan, was the only one. So many wounded were being brought in; she was the one examining them. I couldn’t call, there was no connection. I was taking medications myself.”

In some cases, residents resorted to self-treatment.

One respondent from Martuni said:

“In our basement people became unwell; we were all like doctors, we brought supplies down to the basement from the kindergarten nurse’s room.”

According to another respondent:

“You couldn’t get medical assistance at that time, because there were hundreds of wounded, and then the gas station explosion... that was the end.”

It was noted that the Russian side, in some cases, provided medical assistance, mainly by transporting the wounded.

7. Persons missing and captured as a result of the September 2023 attack

The number of civilians missing as a result of the September 2023 attack is difficult to determine precisely. The reasons for their disappearance vary - from military operations and evacuation carried out under panic conditions to the explosion of a fuel depot near Stepanakert. It is often also difficult to clearly distinguish between missing civilians and military personnel, since those providing testimonies did not have sufficient details regarding their social status and occupations.

Missing persons as a result of the fuel depot explosion

On the morning of September 25, 2023, the Artsakh Information արած announced that all citizens wishing to relocate from Artsakh to the Republic of Armenia would be provided with free fuel. For the purpose of obtaining fuel, hundreds of citizens (almost all male) gathered that same day at the fuel depot in Berkadzor adjacent to the Stepanakert–Askeran highway.

A major explosion occurred at the fuel depot, the causes of which remain unknown to this day. Azerbaijan has not undertaken sufficient efforts to investigate the incident, nor has it taken actions to locate Armenians missing as a result of the explosion. Regardless of the cause, the victims of this explosion should be considered victims of military operations, as their forced displacement led to the tragedy.

As of now, at least 218 deaths as a result of the explosion have been confirmed. Hundreds of people (by various estimates, around 300) were injured, and the whereabouts of 23 missing persons remain unknown.³

A respondent from Aygestan village of the Askeran district stated that a young man from his village went missing after the fuel depot explosion:

“There was a boy from the village, but after the fuel explosion they still haven’t found him.” Another respondent stated:

“There was a girl in the area whose DNA has still not been found as a result of the explosion.”

The same respondent also mentioned the name of another missing person, Samvel Safaryan, who is the son of the respondent’s maternal aunt’s daughter.

Missing persons as a result of military operations

³ For more details on the consequences and legal assessments of the explosion, see the report "ON THE TWENTY-THREE MISSING AFTER THE 2023 GAS DEPOT EXPLOSION" prepared by the Center for International and Comparative Law. <https://iclaw.am/publications/14/details>

The most detailed described case of disappearance concerns the husband and brother of Lusine Khachatryan from Karmir village of the Askeran district. The respondent's husband went to a combat position on September 18, and he was last seen on the 19th. Lusine Khachatryan's brother was also at the position with him.

"Their post is located on the Sznnek–Karmir village road, which goes down toward the city. At that position he was the platoon commander. They went on rotation as a group of nine—him, my brother, and seven others."

According to the respondent, one of her husband's fellow servicemen said that the last time her husband spoke, he said:

"I'll come and take Marat too (the respondent's brother – ed.) and then I'll get out."

It was also reported that someone heard Azerbaijani speech:

"Zdavaytes, zdavaytes, strelyat budem (Surrender, surrender, otherwise we will shoot – ed.)."

According to the respondent, footage from the NSS showed that Azerbaijanis took two persons into territory under their control. It is possible that those two missing persons are the respondent's husband and brother.

The respondent also noted the limited nature of rescue operations:

"From September 23 to 29 the rescuers worked, but there is a gorge that they did not inspect."

Missing persons near Khachmach and Karmir villages

Robert Musayelyan, born in 1940, is a citizen with a second-degree disability who went missing as part of a group of six people. They attempted to walk from Khachmach village to Karmir village. The respondent, his son, stated:

"He had mobility problems, sat down in a clearing and said, 'Go on, I can't move.'"

According to the same respondent, the rescue operations were incomplete:

"Those rescue search operations consisted of only one visit."

Missing persons from Nerkin Sznnek

Another missing person is Shura Manasyan, who remained in a village that came under Azerbaijani control. He was unable to leave the shelter.

Other missing persons

One respondent spoke about Sashik and Komitas Hakobyan, who went missing in Stepanakert.

Another respondent spoke about a Yerkrpah member named Garik, who went missing in Sznnek.

A volunteer militia member named Tigran Manasyan was also made, who also went missing during service.

Another serviceman is Karlen Hakobyan, who was last seen alive at a combat position but never returned.

Other missing persons were mentioned without specific identifying details. Their names were listed as: Geno, Davit (Nune's son), Gavrusha Emiryan, Arsen Hayrapetyan.

Assumptions regarding persons being taken captive

After the entry of Azerbaijani forces, alleged cases of capture were recorded among both military personnel and civilians. Some of those captured were later returned through the Red Cross, while several are still considered to be in captivity.

On the road between Khachmach and Karmir villages, according to assumptions and indirect data, at least 3 out of a group of 6 evacuees were captured. One respondent stated:

"They failed to get out of that encirclement... they were captured in an as-yet-unknown location and to this day are held in Baku prisons. There is confirmed information that they are in Baku prisons, because contact has been established with relatives through the Red Cross."

From the mentioned group of six, one elderly woman and a young man with a disability were also captured but were returned through the Red Cross after seven days.

"Since Voskanian Urvard was an elderly woman, over 80 years old, she reached that section of Karmir village with great difficulty. She could not continue the journey. In some area there, she sat in a field and, according to her account, the Azerbaijanis noticed her there and captured her. And Mavrik Pashayanyan, the young man, continued moving and was also discovered. Both were held in the same place."

Russian citizen Levon Tarkhanyan was captured when, after the end of the military operations, he returned to the village to retrieve belongings he had left behind. Most likely, he was captured after being mistaken for General Levon Mnatsakanyan.

“On the day of evacuation he left the village, then the next day he went back again and entered the village, where the Azerbaijanis were already present. When returning again, they caught him, opened his passport, read ‘Levon,’ and thought he was Levon Mnatsakanyan. He says they beat him badly, took him to Baku, and he spent 33 days alone. The general came in and said, ‘Who is this bum? Take him away, get rid of him.’ He thought they were taking him to be killed. Instead, they handed him over to the Red Cross.”

Currently, Levon Tarkhanyan resides in Russia.

There is also an assumption regarding the possible capture of another individual, Abel Mirzoyan, whose body has not been found to this day.

8. The impact of the September 2023 attack on settlements, state and community property, and the population's vital activity

The impact of the attack on the population's vital activity and settlements

The attack that began on September 19, 2023, severely disrupted the life of the population of Artsakh, which had already been living under blockade conditions for months. Panic began, most people moved to shelters, normal life came to a halt, and public services (including schools and state institutions) either ceased operations or were engaged in activities outside their core functions.

In Martuni, for example, after the death of the mayor, municipal employees dealt not only with social issues but also with procuring materials needed for the preparation of coffins.

The situation that emerged had a profound impact on people's personal lives. Almost everyone's personal and professional plans were disrupted.

“If the watchdog falls among the sheep. A Turkish–Armenian scene. Panicked people, crying children, women.”

“Mainly the bakeries were operating; nothing else.”

“My daughter wanted to learn manicure or hairdressing, then the blockade started, then the fighting, and it all remained unfinished.”

Water supply

During the September 19 attack, water supply in some settlements was intermittent; especially in places where water supply depended on electricity, water was provided only when electricity was available.

“From September 19 to 21 there was no water in Martuni; we used the water we had collected in containers.”

No water supply problems arose in settlements where water sources were nearby.

Electricity

Starting on September 19, Artsakh was partially or completely without electricity. Electricity was supplied intermittently. In Stepanakert and Martuni it was restored starting from September 25, for three hours a day.

“There was nothing at all. We did everything on the stove. We threw in firewood and managed.”

“There were a few generators, and in order to charge phones and things, we would go to the Government building and find some acquaintance who worked there and charge the phones right in their office.”

People who had taken shelter in basements remained in darkness for days, especially spending nights in complete darkness.

As is known, after the start of the attack there was a large flow of people toward Ivanyan Airport. People sheltering in the airport area had electricity at five-hour intervals.

Internet

In the first days of the war, internet stations were struck, as a result of which connectivity was largely disrupted. The lack of information deepened people’s uncertainty and panic. In some cases, with limited settings, it was possible to use 2G internet.

“One would work, another wouldn’t - mixed like that.”

Telephone communication

Mobile communication functioned intermittently or only in certain locations. People climbed hills or other elevated places to establish a connection.

In Martuni, residents passed information to each other by walking from place to place. The absence of communication was especially difficult for families whose members were in service.

“One would go, another would come, passing information to each other, like that.”

“They went to very distant places to catch a signal.”

“When you realize that the calls are going through but the person doesn’t answer, you start even more... You don’t think that he... You probably think more that something has happened to him, sorry.”

Damage to settlements

Due to the short duration of the military operations and the bypassing of most settlements by Azerbaijani forces, there was no large-scale damage to private property. However, cases of damage were recorded in individual (mainly border) communities.

Residents often mentioned shattered windows and damage to household appliances, cars, or household property. In addition to homes, office spaces were also damaged.

Settlements near which military strongpoints existed or where there were concentrations of military personnel were also targeted. Houses and structures located near such areas also suffered. Some of the bombs did not reach their intended targets and fell in residential areas, increasing the scale of damage.

A respondent from Karmir village of the Askeran district stated that before leaving he noticed two damaged houses: the school principal's house and smoke coming from the house above his own. In Nerkin Sznnek village, Azerbaijanis fired after retreating servicemen, which caused damage to village houses. In Kusapat village of the Martakert district, 4–5 houses were damaged, and in Vardadzor village a barn collapsed.

A number of residents noted that they were unable to assess the damage caused due to evacuation and the need to ensure personal safety.

The greatest damage was recorded in the Martakert and Martuni districts, particularly in Nerkin Horatagh, Sos, Kusapat, Vardadzor, Chldran, Sarushen, and Karmir villages. In some cases, not only houses but also courtyards, shops, vegetable gardens, and other infrastructure were targeted during shelling.

The attack on Sos village of the Martuni district was massive, leading to the complete destruction of more than 20 houses and partial destruction of 50–60 houses.

“A shell hit the roof, and the car was also damaged.”

“When the shell hit, the ceiling and everything in the house was affected. On the right and left of the house it was all shelling. Everything cursed, everything there - doors, windows, everything.”

“I bought a refrigerator on credit; it got hit - there's a shrapnel piece inside the refrigerator, the washing machine is broken.”

“In Martuni I had an office; I was the head of an NGO. A shell fell next to the office. Well, whatever was there - since the shell, the blast wave shattered all the windows, the office windows were broken, there was a computer there, the computer was broken.”

“They were hitting the position near Machkalashen village. When it didn't hit the position, it passed and came to the village - the same for the directions of Taghavard, Karmir village, Sarushen.”

“In Stepanakert on Azatamartikneri Street there is a bridge. They probably tried to send that bomb onto the bridge, but it fell into the residential area - the residential part of the street after the bridge—and a building very close to the university was also damaged.”

“Two or three rockets randomly fell in the village.”

“You didn’t know whether it was coming from the right or the left, from the front or from behind. Like hail on you. Shells were raining down on the village.”

“The house also got shrapnel hits, the roof was pierced, the wall of the child’s room was blown apart.”

“A plane came; they didn’t drop on our village, but they dropped on Haterk.”

Damage to settlement infrastructure

During the attack, strikes were carried out on the electricity networks, communication systems, and other infrastructure of various settlements.

For example, the shell that fell near the administrative building of the Martuni municipality can be considered a case of targeted attack, since similar strikes at the same location occurred during the 2020 war as well.

As a result of strikes on the Stepanakert power grid and the power grid of Lusadzor village in the Askeran district, homes in Stepanakert and Lusadzor were left without electricity. In Moshkhmat, damage to power lines caused the roof of a house to collapse. Damage was inflicted on the small hydropower plants of Martakert city and Kusapat village. In Kaghartsi village, an internet connection was disrupted due to a bomb explosion. Damage to electrical wires also interrupted electricity supply in other communities.

Schools and kindergartens were also hit. The windows of the Kusapat school were shattered, and part of the Herher school collapsed. In Martuni city, a shell fell into the yards of a school and a kindergarten, damaging doors and windows. In the kindergarten, serious damage to the building’s interior was recorded, including the shattering of the basement door and mirrors. In addition, the sports complex in Martuni was also damaged.

“The roof collapsed; they hit the electrical wires.”

“The school windows were shattered.”

“Part of the school building was damaged and collapsed.”

“At the same shell impact site, right in front of the kindergarten door where you enter... all the mirrors in the building were broken, and the blast wave was so strong that the basement door opened and the shattered mirrors and things flew into the basement corridor.”

Spiritual and cultural targets of the attack

During the military operations, the targeting of spiritual and cultural structures was limited, but a number of cases indicate that some strikes may have been intentional.

After the strike on the cultural complex in Stepanakert, it was completely covered in dust. The Yeghishe Monastery of Chartar was targeted. The church in Martuni was also damaged. Moreover, the location of the strike was identical to the strike location in 2020, which constitutes indirect evidence of intentionality.

Monuments were also struck. The large cross of Stepanakert was damaged. In Vardadzor, fire was opened on a monument with images of soldiers, even though there were no people in the area. In Martuni, gunfire was recorded on the statue of Monte Melkonyan.

Some respondents later (after already leaving Artsakh) learned about the destruction of spiritual and cultural monuments, churches, entire cemeteries, and individual gravestones near their villages through videos circulating on the internet.

“The big cross opposite Stepanakert - I saw how they cut it down and threw it already. It was a beautiful cross; I saw that.”

“We had a monument; they were shooting at the pictures. They were shooting at the pictures of the boys - the village boys saw it.”

“They also shot at Avo’s statue; that was intentional.”

“In another video, the brotherly cemetery of Khachents village is leveled to the ground - there is nothing left, and the Turk is filming, there is nothing.”

“In Haterk village they were shooting with automatic weapons, destroying graves. In Stepanakert they were destroying our churches and cutting down the crosses.”

Seeing their home, garden, or settlement in videos circulating online evokes conflicting feelings among many respondents. Some people noted that they prefer not to see it at all.

“I basically just play games all day, I don’t even go in (meaning the internet – ed.). Even if it comes, I try to run away from such things - from TV, from everything.”

“Whenever they post... many times I delete it.”

“I deleted my social networks, because those memories that come up every day when you enter Facebook are terribly painful, so... You think it’s a dream, that you’ll wake up any moment.”

9. The Forced Displacement of the Population from Artsakh

The forced displacement and relocation of the population from Artsakh to Armenia was a severe and complex ordeal. The journey, which lasted two or more days, exacerbated the consequences of the blockade and became the cause of new deprivations.

The displacement of the population, which began on September 23, continued until the end of that month, while the most massive movement of people took place on September 25 and 26.

Many were forced to spend the night in their cars with family members, children, and elderly people. Cars remained stuck for long periods in traffic jams, especially at the Shushi hairpin turns and near the Stepanakert bridge.

After the explosion at the fuel depot, ambulances were also overloaded, which further intensified the traffic jams.

“The blockade didn’t have as many problems as those three days on the road.”

“When we reached Kornidzor, there was already internet, and I wrote in quite some detail about what awaited people.”

Reasons for relocating from Artsakh to the Republic of Armenia

The reasons for Artsakh residents’ relocation to Armenia are multifaceted, but the recurring thread running through all responses is overall instability and the feeling of forced (coerced) displacement.

The mass, large-scale nature of the displacement became the main reason for leaving. From a certain point onward, it became universal, exerting an overwhelming social contagion effect on others.

The sense of hopelessness and the fact that large numbers of acquaintances and relatives were leaving also influenced the decision of those people to leave who previously had no such intention.

Some stayed relatively longer, postponing the moment of departure as much as possible in order to assess the situation comprehensively. But ultimately, they too left Artsakh once they became convinced that no one was remaining.

“If we stayed, what would we do, when everyone was leaving?”

“Well, we were Armenians, they wouldn’t let us live in Karabakh either. That was being contested.”

Some residents left after realizing that without state support, life in Artsakh had become difficult or impossible.

“If we don’t have a state and armed forces, then it’s clear we can’t live here.”

The presence of Azerbaijanis as a security risk

People did not feel safe in the presence of Azerbaijanis. Many feared possible violence and reprisals.

The presence of armed Azerbaijanis caused fear and stress among people, especially among women, children, and the elderly.

“Just their presence... when the kids saw the Azerbaijanis... crying.”

Respondents stated that Armenians and Azerbaijanis have no possibilities for peaceful coexistence, based on painful historical experience.

“I wasn’t even sure we would get out of Karabakh alive. They might slaughter us on the road - who knows.”

“It’s impossible for an Armenian and an Azerbaijani to live together. Ask any of their students - even the youngest - and they’ll say the Armenian is our enemy.”

“We were already feeling that the Turk, his special forces, were driving through our street in vehicles. The children were coming and saying - the neighborhood is full of Turkish vehicles.”

Information about violence and threats

During those days, information circulated about cases of killings and torture. Although the information was not confirmed in all cases, the impact of frightening stories was significant, prompting many to leave.

“You hear someone saying - the Turks have entered, they slaughtered the children, gathered them and took them away...”

“They were cutting off people’s ears.”

Some people received phone messages in Russian from unknown sources and interpreted them as threats sent by Azerbaijanis:

“Your dark days are over, live a wonderful life.”

Absence of official (state) protection

Artsakh residents stated that both the authorities of Armenia and international organizations refused to protect them. This belief also contributed to the mass exodus. Many saw

that the army had been disarmed and that Russian peacekeepers were cooperating with Azerbaijanis.

“Now that Armenia has washed its hands of it, Karabakh no longer has a guarantor, there’s no point in staying there. My brother was on the posts; it was the Russians who negotiated with the Azerbaijanis, and they handed over the weapons.”

“When the soldiers came home without weapons and said that we would no longer have an army... people just wanted to somehow get out with nothing.”

People also left their settlements following direct or indirect urging by local authorities. The inaction and wrong decisions of central and local authorities likewise contributed to deepening hopelessness.

Difficulties of transportation and movement

People reached Armenia by various means: many in their own cars, some in the cars of relatives or neighbors. There were also large passenger vehicles - minibuses.

In some cases, local authorities provided transportation, including buses. However, boarding buses often took place amid panic, chaos, and competition for seats.

“There was one bus where the situation was so chaotic that the driver left halfway and went away. People were smashing things up, unable to fit in, fear had already set in - let’s escape quickly.”

In some cases, people were transported in Kamaz trucks or military vehicles.

There was a case when several families, about 68 people, fit into one Kamaz. They traveled standing up, in the rain, under very difficult conditions.

“Our daughter-in-law got a car from her boss, and we got into the back.”

There were people who accidentally found an abandoned and broken Zhiguli car, fixed the malfunction, and set off on the road with it.

“There was a Zhiguli on the road, it had broken down. I’m a specialist, I fixed it and got it going. I said, wherever it stops, it stops. I drove it.”

Families were sometimes split: some family members were forced to remain temporarily in Artsakh due to lack of transportation or to resolve property-related issues.

“My father stayed there because Artsakhbank decided that the pledged gold would be given the next day. And since we also had pledged gold, my father stayed, took the gold, and came a few days later.”

Neighbors and relatives often formed convoys in order to help one another along the way.

“Along the way it was as if we were relatives - people would get acquainted: where are you from, what do you need, how can we help? One would give medicine, another whatever they could.”

Vehicle breakdowns and accidents occurred frequently along the road, forcing people to change means of transportation.

“My brother’s car brake hose burst at 3 a.m.... somehow tying it up with things, waiting until morning; during that time accidents happened.”

Prolonged time spent in cars and poor conditions aggravated people’s health problems, caused fatigue and pain, and contributed to children’s crying and anxiety.

“No one could move their legs, they were numb. My mother-in-law was saying my back hurts, my father-in-law’s blood pressure went up, the children half-starved, tired - when will we arrive? We kept calming them, saying there’s not much left.”

“The medication that was supposed to be administered by injection was simply poured into the mouth to survive until reaching Goris.”

Panic arose in Martuni when people saw armed Azerbaijanis and thought that hostage-taking was imminent.

“At that moment, two UAZ vehicles - ‘bukhanka’ UAZs - from the Azerbaijani forces came near the school, stopped at the intersection and got out; total panic - they all panicked... Then the Russians came after them and took them away.”

“We were standing on top of each other, trampling the children.”

Residents had difficulty obtaining fuel at the last moment. Some were forced to buy it at very high prices, while others found fuel on the road with the help of compatriots and even Azerbaijanis. In this matter, Azerbaijani assistance was motivated by the desire to get rid of Artsakh residents as quickly as possible.

“They gave gasoline (meaning the Azerbaijanis – ed.) so that we would leave as quickly as possible.”

In some cases, village administrations and authorities also provided support by supplying fuel or vouchers.

“We applied to the government, to the Minister of State, personally me. I took gasoline vouchers, went and got gasoline, filled cars, 16 cars, and came back.”

“We bought a canister for 100,000.”

“On the road there were guys from our village, they helped us reach Goris.”

“The gasoline of the car next to us ran out, and he found some right there in the traffic jam.”

The condition of the road and weather conditions became additional challenges. Respondents mentioned strong winds, cold, as well as poorly maintained and narrow roads, especially in the presence of large vehicles and trucks. Many were forced to get out of the car and light fires to keep warm.

Vehicle breakdowns, which could last for days, also led to traffic jams. The jams were mainly regulated through the intervention of peacekeepers, who periodically allowed small groups of cars to pass.

There were generally no major communication problems, but sometimes communication was interrupted due to the lack of phone charging or the seizure of the Stepanakert communication hub.

“Every 10–15 minutes we stopped so that the Russians would let one batch through, then us.”

“Our communication was cut off because they entered Stepanakert and took over the communication hub; our connection was cut.”

Children on the road of forced displacement

Children were the most vulnerable group. On the road to Armenia, hunger, thirst, cold, and the lack of hygienic conditions worsened their situation. Many children fell ill, suffered from cold exposure, or deteriorated along the way. A widespread problem was the lack of diapers.

“My children are crying: mom, we’re hungry. I say, be patient, we’re not at home.”

“They saw that we were with children and elderly people and gave us some of that canned meat.”

“There were no diapers either. The whole way the child held it in. That’s the hardest thing, that physiological issue; you can endure hunger for 2–3 days.”

“The kids got sick in the car - nausea, vomiting. Good thing I had taken clothes for the children.”

Deaths

According to some estimates, the total number of deaths on the way to Armenia has reached around 67. However, this statistic has not yet been confirmed by various sources.

“My friend’s aunt died on the road, she had a stroke.” “Her heart stopped.”

“That woman had health problems, because of that stress she collapsed, fell to the ground, and stayed like that... she had died.”

“My aunt’s daughter-in-law died... there is no medicine, there is nothing.”

Tragic incidents were also recorded on the road. One woman died after being trapped between vehicles.

“The handbrake was on, everything was set, but still the car moved, and that woman ended up between two cars.”

“The cars would stand still for about 10 minutes, then move for one minute. That young woman went and ended up under that Kamaz. The driver didn’t know, she remained underneath.”

In a number of cases, people died immediately after reaching Armenia, due to deterioration of their health from the long journey or due to the lack of medication.

“Well, we brought the medicines with us, but by the time we got here, she died. One day later.”

“My mom came and couldn’t endure it, she died.”

Traffic jams on the road, inhumane conditions, and other hardships also led to deaths. One respondent recounts that a woman left the road to attend to her natural needs and fell into a ravine.

“The danger is that they needed a toilet, they went. It’s a ravine, she slipped, her foot gave way, she fell into the ravine.”

Food and water

Many people left Artsakh without sufficient food, thinking that the road would be short. Only later, when it became clear that the nearly 100 km road to Armenia could take 20 hours or more, did those leaving begin to take food and water with them.

“When I looked from the mountain and saw how big the traffic jam was, I said, yours is definitely going to take 20 hours, so take food, water, stuff like that.”

Among the commonly taken food were canned stewed meat (tushonka), bread, porridge, as well as meat prepared from animals slaughtered along the road. Some people took walnuts, potatoes, eggs, fruits, but these products spoiled quickly. People also picked fruits from nearby orchards along the road.

The food and water provided on the territory of Armenia, in Kornidzor, were considered salvation after a long period of hunger.

“Well, we had some bread and stuff, that’s it, it finished immediately.”

“From start to finish there was no food, there was no water either.”

People who had found shelter at the airport before leaving received canned goods and ready-made food from Russian peacekeepers.

“Well, the Russians gave us a lot at the airport, I filmed it: canned meat, ready-made meals.”

The issue of water was mentioned relatively less, since many took water from streams or had bottled water. Those traveling by buses were provided water by the drivers. There were cases when people had only 5 liters of water for a two-day journey.

“The driver kept it, gave it out from the trunk in crates, take it, it was good water, bottled water.”

“There was no water, there were 5 liters of water. Child, I also have diabetes, I’d put water in my mouth, keep it for a bit; with half a liter of water I made it through two days.”

Some people, due to hunger and thirst, received or tried to receive help from Azerbaijanis. Near the Hakari Bridge, Azerbaijanis distributed candies, cookies, and water.

Nevertheless, the majority refused to accept these offers due to distrust. Others took the offered assistance but later threw it away.

“When the Turk offered water, I turned my face away so he wouldn’t continue the conversation.”

“The car sped up so as not to take it (meaning the food or water offered by the Azerbaijanis – ed.).”

“When passing the post, the Turks gave about 20 packs of cookies. We passed them and threw them away. The whole field was full of Turkish cookies, but I ate one — well, hungry, thirsty.”

“My father took it, threw it away, said it could be poisoned, could kill the children, we’re almost there.”

“The Azerbaijanis gave us water and cookies on the road. I was so hungry that I wanted to open those cookies, but they didn’t let me, they said it might be poisoned... We ate that bread like our eyes were going to pop out. We were both crying and laughing. It was an awful experience.”

People’s psychological state

The entire process of forced displacement was accompanied by great stress, tension, and anxiety. People left their homeland in conditions of uncertainty, not knowing whether they would have the opportunity to return. Many noted that they cried constantly on the road.

Artsakh residents often described their psychological state during those days as “zombified,” “robotized.”

The heavy psychological experiences continue to this day.

“Well, you’re constantly in a state of stress, we’ve become zombies, I can’t imagine how we got through it.”

“We cried all day long.”

“...It’s an indescribable state, when you leave your country, your homeland, your home, and leave under such conditions, knowing that this is the end, that you won’t have the opportunity

to return to your native home, your homeland. And those experiences, one could say, have not disappeared to this day.”

“Grandpa and grandma were crying all the time. At one point grandma’s blood pressure went up.”

“We stood in one place for 7 hours: rain, darkness. You don’t know where you are.”

Particular anxiety arose in families that were forced to leave in different vehicles or became separated during the journey. They were deeply worried about the safety of their relatives.

“Well, during the relocation I was tormented by the thought that we left my husband there and came out.”

“How is it supposed to be, you leave your homeland and come; we were dead, just not buried.”

“All of us were kind of robotized, our brains weren’t working anymore, we didn’t know what we were doing, where we were going, what we were leaving behind. Only now do we feel it; at that time we didn’t.”

Psychological pressure and humiliating treatment by Azerbaijanis

At the Hakari Bridge and other checkpoints, Azerbaijanis often greeted departing Artsakh residents with insulting gestures and expressions, threats, and mockery.

There were also incidents of Azerbaijanis firing shots into the air.

Even in the absence of specific actions or verbal calls, their posture, behavior, and non-verbal expressions nevertheless carried an indirectly humiliating nature.

“A contemptuous look, the look of a winner. But they didn’t say anything.”

“They were happy that we were leaving, they waved us off with their hands.”

“They looked at us like a Turk looks at pork.”

“You see people looking at you, taking pleasure, rejoicing, celebrating their victory.”

There were also direct threats, insulting and degrading expressions.

“They show obscene things with their hands, give obscene gestures... I said, none of you make a sound.”

“He was pointing his finger, swearing.”

“In the 90s you know you got away easily, now you’ve come here, do you want to pass?”

“He didn’t say Martuni, he gave the Turkish name, told him to say it that way. Grandpa said, I won’t say that... he hit him and said, go.”

“Come on, quickly into the car. You’re a kid, but you can’t talk... they take you to Baku, you disappear.”

“Get lost, fast.”

“Let’s have an Armenian cognac together.”

“Remember well, Armenians, that when we left, we didn’t leave like you.”

“Even near Shushi fortress the Turks were filming us: ‘move, move, get out.’”

“They mocked us, gave obscene gestures, cursed our fathers and mothers.”

Pressure and violence during passage through the Hakari Bridge

Passing through the Hakari Bridge, which connects Artsakh and Armenia, intensified fear and anxiety among the population. There was widespread information that people were being detained near the bridge for participation in the war. Many who had been members of Artsakh’s self-defense forces feared that they too could be detained.

“At the Hakari Bridge we didn’t know what kind of fate could await us, because there had already been cases where people were abducted under the pretext of participating in military actions. And since in Artsakh, one could say, the overwhelming majority had participated in self-defense actions, anyone could be taken.”

“There was talk that men wouldn’t be allowed to pass, because Martuni was a thorn in their throat.”

“They said they were boarding those buses, saying there was a list of about 300 people, that they were looking for them...”

“Until we got very close to the Hakari Bridge, we were trembling.”

During inspections, women and children stayed in the vehicles, while men were mostly taken out of the cars and escorted by armed personnel, walking about 100 meters. While walking, they were photographed or filmed.

“If they suspect you’re over 18, they say, come out, walk in front of the cameras.”

“At the Hakari Bridge they took men out of the cars, lined them up in a single row, and started asking questions. They look at photos on the phone, compare you to someone.”

“They stopped us, checked the car, opened the ‘багажник’ (trunk – ed.), then photographed grandpa with some special camera... asked a few questions. But in many cases, for example, there was nothing like that, they just passed through.”

“In the car, every young man, from the driver to a seventy-something man (except my father), they took them out at the post. They look at photos on the phone to see who they need.”

“They stopped the cars themselves, held the phone up to people’s faces to see whether it was the person they wanted or not.”

“Then they spoke Turkish. The man, realizing that they were testing him like that, said, I don’t understand your language. They said, no, you do understand, you just don’t want to speak it. They were intimidating him.

The man had undergone heart surgery four times, felt unwell, and they said that since he was nervous, he must be the person they were looking for. They photographed his passport, asked his name and surname, took him to check, came back and said, no, it’s not him, let him go.”

Azerbaijanis inspected passports, reviewed photos on phones, and opened trunks in search of weapons.

Many people were frightened by the threatening nature of the inspections, the voices, the armed men. Children experienced severe stress, even closing their eyes out of fear. Some children later visited psychologists in Armenia to overcome their fear.

“My mom cried so much. My kids cried so much, saying they were going to take grandpa. My mom and wife were saying, they won’t take him, calm down.”

“Up to the Hakari Bridge everyone was crying. We passed, and suddenly it was like everything went numb, like empty.”

“The kids closed their eyes so they wouldn’t be afraid.”

“Dad, don’t open the door.”

“Rosie is a very calm child, she rarely cries, and even then her voice can be very loud. But as soon as we reached Hakari, this child started crying anxiously.”

“When we reached the Hakari Bridge, they asked how many people we were. My husband said five, three of them children. They said, you need to open the back door, we need to check the children. The kids were huddled to one side, he didn’t do anything.”

On the bridge, Azerbaijanis mostly displayed pronounced behavior of control and dominance, sometimes with deliberately rough treatment.

Near the Hakari Bridge, Azerbaijanis confiscated various items from people: gold rings, chains, and other valuable personal belongings.

“There have been cases, people are in a convoy, moving. He goes through 100 cars, comes back, sees, for example, gold. Says, take it off and give it to me. They take it off and give it, what could they do.”

“They told Arturik, do you have a lighter, he says yes, he shows it, they say, well, let’s see. It’s a simple black lighter, they took it. The meaning was: I’ll do whatever I want.”

“They pulled off and took Henrikyan Henri’s cross.”

“They said there shouldn’t even be a cross on our hands, there was fear. My grandson had a cross, my daughter took it off out of fear and hid it.”

There were incidents of violence: kicks, people being shoved around. There were cases when people were deprived of their freedom for hours or held in cars, forced to say words in favor of Azerbaijan.

“The Russian and the Azerbaijani were standing at Hakari. Honestly, when we saw the Russian, we said, maybe we’ll pass.”

“Well what can you do, you’re in their hands, what can you do at midnight.”

“Out of spite they put armed men there, with rifles, knives on their sides, grenades hanging there.”

“We witnessed how they took a man away. We didn’t know him. We wanted to stop, at least to know why they were taking him. They said, go, hit with batons, with insulting words.”

“They speak to him very roughly. One pushes one person, another pushes the other.”

“We are slaves, and they are the masters, that’s it. They entered with weapons, we are unarmed people, with that behavior, as if they are the masters of this world and we are the slaves of this world.”

“One of the Azerbaijani border guards standing at Hakari was interrogating my husband. Another opened the door roughly, saw that I was feeding the baby, but looked me straight in the eyes. There was a terrible wind, it was very cold, and the fear...”

“They stopped us, their general or whoever it was, speaking Russian: where are you going? I say, don’t ask questions, I’m already shaken. He says, okay, drive, go.”

“I got scared and rolled up the window, he said (the Azerbaijani – ed.), lower it, don’t be afraid.”

“With rough treatment too - ‘go!’ hitting the car, they had sticks in their hands.”

“They took him for several hours, brought him back beaten; he had to say that he lived in Khankendi, that Azerbaijanis are good, and so on.”

“There was one vehicle, a Kamaz, they took the driver out, one Azerbaijani sat at the wheel, there was some post, a yard, they took that man away, took the vehicle with him.”

The attitude of Azerbaijanis also depended on the individuals on duty at that moment. There were Azerbaijanis with explicitly anti-Armenian positions, and there were also neutral or even benevolent attitudes.

“There are people who are normal, there are people who grab and beat.”

“There were shifts that were good. There were shifts that were very bad, they really pressured the people.”

“Azerbaijanis are not the light of my eyes, but they treated us very benevolently, even opened the car door, smiling, normal, like our Armenians.”

Presence of Azerbaijani media

The presence of Azerbaijani media near the Hakari Bridge caused great tension among people. Many avoided them or tried not to speak, being cautious of the fact that armed people were standing behind them.

Media questions were often guided, aimed at obtaining answers that would present Azerbaijan or Azerbaijanis in a positive light. There were cases when people were filmed against their will, forcibly taken out of vehicles.

“They made me talk, I didn’t say anything, I pretended to be crazy and passed like that, came to the other side.”

“A reporter approaches you, how can you say something bad, when they are armed, for example, 10 meters away there is a man standing with a weapon, who a day or two earlier was bombing you.”

“There were even cases when they took people out of the car and filmed them.”

People remaining in Artsakh

The majority of respondents stated that almost the entire population left Artsakh and moved to Armenia. However, there were exceptions, mainly due to health problems, social isolation, or personal decisions. The most widespread view is that those who remained were solitary, elderly, or sick people.

“People didn’t stay. Maybe those people stayed who are alone, who have no one.”

Specific individuals who remained in Artsakh were mentioned:

- A man named Gago, who refused to leave his home, saying that he could not abandon his house.
- A person known by the nickname Gipsy Mishik, who later gave interviews to Azerbaijani media and made accusations against Armenians. Videos featuring him are available online.
- Two people remained in Martuni: a solitary woman who refused to leave, and another person who, according to information, had mental health problems. One respondent reported that one of these individuals remaining in Martuni committed suicide, and the funeral was organized by the Red Cross. How reliable this information is is difficult to determine.

- A resident of Stepanakert recalled his neighbor, a man around 60 years old with mental health problems who had no relatives. He also mentioned a married couple whose children had come to the Republic of Armenia, while they themselves remained in Artsakh.

- An ethnic Russian individual who remained in Artsakh was also mentioned.

- One respondent from Stepanakert mentioned a female lecturer at Artsakh State University who also remained.

Respondents pointed out cases known to them. It is possible, however, that some of these individuals later moved to Armenia.

10. Losses of private property as a result of the forced displacement of the population of Artsakh

The majority of Artsakh residents, forcibly displaced to the Republic of Armenia, were able to take with them only a very small part of their property. Many left their places of residence hastily, without taking any belongings, being convinced that the situation was temporary. In the initial period, the hope of returning was so strong that most respondents believed that what had happened was similar to the wartime situations of 2016 or 2020, after which they would return. For this reason, almost all of their movable and immovable property remained under the control of Azerbaijan.

Immovable property

The main material losses concern apartments, houses, and the adjoining areas. There are many families that lost several properties.

“We left three houses: one in Stepanakert, two in Shushi. And I also left a couple of garages.”

“Our house had 16 rooms, it was 500 square meters. We left that house too.”

Many houses were large, two- or three-story. Some, along with the loss of their homes, expressed regret over their newly furnished, renovated condition and newly purchased property. In addition to residential houses, Artsakh residents also lost garages, shops, bakeries (tonirs), barns, warehouses, which often constituted the main source of family income.

“We left the office of the Martuni Youth Center, with computers and a photocopying machine.”

“In Sarushen I had a large warehouse, there were 100 tons of wheat that we used during the blockade. That was left too.”

Vehicles and agricultural machinery

Many Artsakh residents lost vehicles and agricultural machinery - cars, tractors, combines. Many owned several vehicles, of which they were able to take only one out of Artsakh during relocation to Armenia. Many vehicles were not taken out due to the lack of fuel.

“I left a grain combine, a tracked tractor, a large wheeled tractor, a truck, and three passenger cars. All of that remained.”

The loss of tractors and other agricultural machinery was one of the most severe financial blows, especially for families engaged in agriculture, who thus lost their only or main means of livelihood.

Other movable property, valuables, and monetary savings

Tens of thousands of Artsakh residents lost their furniture, household appliances, and other valuables. Interviews frequently mentioned refrigerators, washing machines, gas stoves, televisions, computers, sofas, armchairs, chairs, tables, beds, dishes, and other property that remained in apartments and houses.

Some respondents noted that they also left behind their valuable jewelry and savings, sometimes in large amounts. These losses were due to panic or forgetting the place where they were kept.

“My money was kept somewhere else, I couldn’t find it, we left in confusion.”

“I didn’t manage to lock the house, and the money remained inside.”

“Only the child’s gold earring remained. I didn’t manage to take it.”

“I thought we had taken it, later it turned out the gold had remained.”

Some did not take their valuables out of fear, believing that they would be considered suspicious during checkpoint inspections.

A resident of Martuni noted that he had 10 night-vision devices and communication equipment, each worth between 75,000 and 100,000 drams. He also had a night-vision device worth 5 million drams. He did not take any of this property with him when leaving for Armenia, fearing the possible consequences of Azerbaijani inspections.

Land plots and gardens

Artsakh residents left large areas of agricultural land, from household gardens to fields spanning hectares. These lands were cultivated, often equipped with drip irrigation, and rich in crops.

“Just our walnut orchard with drip irrigation was one hectare. A total of 3.5 hectares of land, and another 3 hectares of pomegranate orchard.”

“I planted loquat orchards in Martuni - the first in Artsakh. I planted 2,000 palm trees, each one was expensive.”

In addition to personal land, Artsakh residents also lost leased plots, farms, and warehouses.

“30 hectares of grain fields, 6 hectares of arable land, a warehouse, barns, and a house in the village of Shosh.”

“A house, two tractors, a combine, three cars, land plots - we left everything in Jankatagh.”

“We had 18,000 square meters of land, not counting the gardens.”

These lands and gardens had not only economic but also cultural and emotional significance for Artsakh residents, as embodiments of decades of work and history.

Animals

Artsakh residents left large numbers of domestic animals: chickens, ducks, pigs, sheep, goats, and others. They also left cattle.

In many cases, before leaving their homes, they released the animals so that they could find food in nature.

“In the village of Mets Shen in the Martakert region, 400–500 head of cattle remained, the same number of sheep, and 1,000 pigs.”

Beekeeping was widespread in Artsakh, and many had beehives. For example, a resident of Martakert left 60 beehives.

Many families were forced to leave behind their dogs and cats.

“I had a cat in the village, but I couldn’t bring my cat. After leaving Stepanakert, it was no longer possible to go to the village.”

Other losses

Most food supplies also remained in Artsakh.

“I left 7 sacks of potatoes.”

“I left 5 tons of wheat, 10 tons of barley.”

“I left 6 tons of potatoes in the cellar.”

One respondent painfully mentioned his valuable library.

“I had a very large and valuable library, more than 1,000 books. That was my entire life’s investment, and it is my greatest loss.”

Regarding the above losses, Artsakh residents have presented relevant documents, photographs, and videos.

Information later received about the abandoned property

Some respondents noted that in photos and videos circulating online, they saw their homes and other property.

For example, a resident of Khachen village stated that he saw his house standing, but with the doors open. A respondent from Inner Sznek noted that he saw the beehives he had left placed in front of the house. A resident of Karmir village stated that he saw his garage in a burned condition.

There are many testimonies about interventions and alterations carried out by Azerbaijanis.

“The bees, the beehives seem to be in front of the house. But there is no separate information.”

“They are showing how they dismantle it, destroy it.”

“They dismantled the beehives and built a house in their place.”

In circulating videos, respondents also saw Azerbaijanis using their abandoned property or operating their equipment. Through satellite images, the absence of abandoned property is sometimes also noticeable.

A resident of Vardadzor village saw an Azerbaijani driving his car, saying, “It’s good, isn’t it, let them see it from Yerevan.” The same respondent, comparing earlier and recent videos, noted that Azerbaijanis had cut and taken the electrical wires from his settlement.

The greatest material losses were suffered by those who owned tractors, who, through satellite images, recorded that the tractors they had left were no longer in their original locations.

“There are people who had 100 beehives. We checked on Google, they’re no longer there, they were looted.”

Documents and personal items brought from Artsakh

Many Artsakh residents were evacuated from their settlements without any preparation, often with just a handbag. They did not manage to take even important documents or family

photographs. For example, one respondent noted that his passport was kept in a separate place and therefore he did not manage to take it.

“We took 3–4 bags with us - the most necessary things, clothes, and some photos. We didn’t take the rest because it wasn’t our car and there was no space.”

“Even my passport, since it wasn’t among the documents my wife took out of the house, it was in another place, I was forced, when I arrived in Armenia, to restore my passport here... Even the vehicle documents, the technical passport and driver’s license, remained in the car, all of that stayed there.”

“I put our photos, the children’s discs, postcards the children made at school and kindergarten, the first tooth, the maternity hospital papers, my last-bell apron into a chest.”

“I took the children’s beadwork, wooden khachkars, certificates.”

A resident of Ivanyan village brought passports and birth certificates but did not manage to take the vehicle documents. A respondent from Askeran did not take documents confirming his surgery, as a result of which he was able to restore his disability status in Armenia only through a photograph he had.

Some respondents were prepared for evacuation.

“My mother-in-law used to say, keep the documents as a priority, be sure to take them. When the shooting started, we stayed in the basement for two days. I went up to the house for a moment and quickly took the documents.”

“Since 2016 we had a bag, and we always kept our documents and basic necessities in that bag. Of course, we updated it every year. We knew that day would come.”

Some respondents noted that they deliberately burned or threw away documents or memory-containing photographs in order to avoid possible dangers during Azerbaijani inspections at checkpoints.

“They said there were cases where, after finding certain items, they stopped people and held them for hours... Fearing that any man could be abducted, for safety reasons people didn’t take anything with them.”

As a result of Azerbaijani inspections, there were exceptional cases of confiscation of items. Mostly symbolic or valuable items were targeted. For example, at the Hakari bridge checkpoint, Azerbaijanis confiscated a backgammon set on the grounds that it depicted the symbol

of Artsakh, the well-known monument “We Are Our Mountains” (or “Grandmother and Grandfather”).

Gold jewelry, rings, chains were also taken. In another case, a sheep or a goat. A respondent leaving from Martuni noted that Azerbaijanis took their wine and vodka.

11. The Subsequent Life of Artsakh Residents in the Republic of Armenia

Accommodation and Primary Support for the Forcibly Displaced Population from Artsakh in the Republic of Armenia

Upon arriving in Armenia, the first stop for Artsakh residents was the village of Kornidzor in Syunik Province, where they were provided with food, water, 10 liters of gasoline for vehicles, and other essential items.

The two main registration centers for the incoming population were Goris and Vayk. Hundreds of residents of Goris (including minors) voluntarily assisted the displaced people.

“When we reached Goris, I told my people: now each of you should find a way to manage on your own.”

“If someone can complain about the people of Goris... the children, leaving their classes, were helping. No one can complain about that.”

Local self-government bodies provided support within their capacities by supplying household items and assisting in finding temporary places of residence.

According to respondents, the distribution of primary assistance was unequal at the initial stage. It was insufficient to meet children’s needs for clothing, food, and other essentials. Receiving financial assistance was complicated, as many were forced to travel to the capital to obtain it.

At the initial stage, Artsakh residents were not charged rent; however, over time, the majority began paying rent. Many families found shelter in the homes of relatives, acquaintances, and even strangers who hosted them.

Initially, many families were also accommodated in hotels and guesthouses. Numerous cases were recorded of accommodation in cultural centers, theaters, schools, kindergartens, and other public and community institutions.

Conditions in the homes and shelters hosting Artsakh residents were often inadequate: small living space, several people in one room, cracks in walls, lack or insufficiency of heating, poor conditions of toilets and bathrooms.

Sleeping on the floor was common due to the lack of beds and bedding.

“It’s the size of our balcony, but what can we do?”

“There was no hot water in that hotel, it was cold. There were empty rooms, but he didn’t want to give them - he’s the owner.”

To this day, frequent changes of residence remain an issue (due to rising rent or other reasons).

“We’re constantly changing houses. We’re still kind of mixed up here.”

Problems of Finding Employment

Displaced Artsakh residents faced difficulties in finding employment due to professional mismatches, lack of jobs corresponding to their previous experience, physical health issues, age restrictions (especially among the elderly), and the limited capacity of the labor market. Finding employment in rural communities was particularly difficult.

“There’s no work in our village. There’s not even anyone from our village here.”

“There’s no work. I go, they say there’s no work, there’s a money problem.”

“We really want to work, but there isn’t anything. We didn’t live like this - back in Karabakh, we always worked.”

“I worked at a coal factory there, in pomegranate fields. Here there’s neither a coal factory nor pomegranate fields.”

“I applied to the nearby school - there was no vacancy for a language specialist.”

“You go to the municipality: brother, what can we do, where can we find work?”

Some have difficulty continuing their professional activities due to the lack of tools or inadequate conditions.

“I’d like to work in a hair salon, but my tools stayed in Artsakh, I don’t have them right now.”

Artsakh residents frequently attend retraining courses to acquire new professions. These mainly include tailoring, hairdressing, cooking, and IT-related professions.

“My daughter wants to go into sewing, she’s studying at a workshop, and I’m at home.”

“I’m thinking maybe I’ll work at TUMO or in another field. Right now, I’m attending courses.”

“I’d like to study cooking.”

“I learned to work with a sewing machine.”

Sometimes prior work experience and skills have helped in finding employment quickly.

“My daughter worked at Artsakhbank. She came and immediately started working here.”

People settled in villages have begun engaging in agriculture. Interestingly, in the initial period, people settled in urban communities also expressed a desire to move to villages to engage in agriculture there.

Some Artsakh residents have shown creative approaches: one received a donated carpet loom to teach traditional carpet weaving; another is considering beekeeping.

“To get a few beehives - maybe the state will become a sponsor.”

Material Conditions

Lack of employment directly affects the material conditions of Artsakh residents. For many, the only or primary source of livelihood is the 50,000 AMD state assistance per person. Most of this amount is spent on rent and utility expenses. Families’ dependence on state assistance is enormous.

“No one works, we live on 40 plus 10 (meaning the state assistance of 50,000 AMD – ed.). We can’t imagine what our tomorrow will be like if this is cut.”

Technical or bureaucratic obstacles sometimes complicate the receipt of pensions and benefits. For example, social security bodies required a 90-year-old pensioner to appear in person, which was impossible due to disability.

One of the common reasons for denying benefits is the rigid application of vulnerability assessment criteria (without a differentiated approach to the situation of Artsakh residents).

“They say if you have a car, it brings income. What income it brings - I don’t know.”

The severe material situation is also reflected in poor household and property conditions.

“There isn’t even a chair for us to sit on.”

Psychological and Health Condition of the Displaced Population

At the initial stage, the psychological and health condition of Artsakh residents was very severe. Due to military actions, blockade, and the hardships of displacement, an increase in illnesses was recorded, especially respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. The unfamiliar environment and the sense of insecurity aggravated psychological problems.

“It was very hard psychologically - you come to an unfamiliar place, you have no home, no place, you don’t know where you’ll stay.”

“Our little one often gets pneumonia because of the dampness.”

“Probably because of the stress, we couldn’t get warm. There was food, but we didn’t warm up.”

Many note that they have overcome stress, but not completely.

“They still haven’t come to their senses.”

“Little by little, we’re getting used to it, adapting to the loss.”

Stress and the sense of loss often manifest through crying or silence.

“Yes, we smile, we laugh, but the pain in the soul still doesn’t go away.”

“During the day we’re all fine, at night everyone is on their own pillow, with their own thoughts, their own memories.”

“My heart keeps filling up, you feel like crying.”

The psychological state of the elderly is especially severe, particularly among those who, over decades before the 2020 war, suffered human and material losses due to the conflict.

“How many times can a person start from zero? What bad thing did you do to anyone that they don’t let you live in your homeland?”

Many mention the constant and oppressive presence of memories.

One of the most painful recurring themes is the impossibility of visiting relatives’ graves.

“I feel very bad psychologically that I can’t go to my mother’s and father’s graves.”

“You scroll through your phone, you remember all the villagers. We left the fallen behind and came.”

The sense of loss and guilt torments especially those who somehow feel responsible.

“They died, he survived - he feels guilty.”

Descriptions of sleepless nights, tense daily life, and mental anxiety are widespread.

“When morning comes, I don’t know - should I run after a psychologist, make bread for my child, take my husband to the hospital... very tense and constantly running.”

Some are distressed by careless and offensive attitudes from parts of the local population in Armenia.

“You sold Karabakh, came and sat on our necks.”

“If someone carries the label of being homeless, that’s the worst name.”

“I don’t want them to fall into that psychological state... I just want them to understand the reality.”

There is also fear of repeated victimization and a new war.

“If they come here and do the same thing, where will we go then?”

Artsakh residents feel disconnected from their former community life in Armenia, living dispersed and isolated. Longing for Artsakh is vivid and sharp among all respondents.

“Everyone is in the embrace of memories. Everyone remembers, no one can forget. Everyone wants to go back to their home.”

“I remember every day, every moment - through a photo or something.”

Longing is especially strong among the elderly and mothers.

“She sets the table, we eat dry buckwheat, and she says our house has jars of pickles, compotes ready, but now we don’t have money to buy juice to drink... and she cries.”

Children constantly ask about returning home.

“My daughter cries, she misses her classmates.”

“Mom, I wish we were in our home, that all this was in our home, and we ate there.”

Children's Psychological Condition

Artsakh parents note that children are gradually overcoming stress, but not fully. There are many cases where children remain tense and fearful.

"My child is aggressive - sometimes cries, sometimes laughs."

"If they hear a sound or a knock, they jump."

"They shoot, he's in fear."

"The little one wakes up from dreams saying: the Turks came."

"The children close the doors, asking: did you lock it?"

Parents try to support children through psychological services.

"My daughter goes to piano lessons, but I asked for a psychologist to work with her as well."

"I took my older child to a psychologist - he was very afraid, making uncontrolled movements."

Conditions for Return

The overwhelming majority of Artsakh residents want to return to their homeland at the first possible opportunity.

"Even if they say the conditions are safe, I'd leave for Artsakh within an hour."

"If the issue of returning Artsakh takes a long time, I'll stay here... but I feel like a guest, I don't feel good."

A small number do not want to return due to personal loss or suffering caused by war.

"She doesn't want to go - she has already seen three wars (said by the mother about her daughter – ed.)."

"I would want to return if my husband weren't missing."

The conditions or prerequisites for return mentioned include:

1. Ensuring security without the presence of Azerbaijanis.

The majority of respondents stated they would not return if Azerbaijanis were present in Artsakh. According to respondents, coexistence with Azerbaijanis is impossible.

“The borders must be far away, 15–20 km.”

“If there is a Turk there, that’s a threat to us.”

2. Presence of peacekeepers ensuring security.

Some place hope in international peacekeepers, following the Kosovo model.

“If there are international guarantees, if international peacekeeping forces are deployed.”

“There should be other peacekeepers you can trust so that if something happens tomorrow, they will protect you.”

However, some completely reject the idea of peacekeeping.

“They’re all lies - peacekeepers, UN forces, Russian forces.”

There are also people who still have hope in the Russian presence.

“We’ll return to Karabakh with Russian passports.”

3. Sovereignty and military protection.

Many emphasize that return is possible only with the restoration of Artsakh’s sovereignty and army. Few support seeing Artsakh as part of the Republic of Armenia. Economic and social guarantees of return are secondary for the majority.

“If there are four walls, we’ll go, renovate, live, and develop our home, our village.”

“As long as there’s bread at the initial stage, we’ll do the rest ourselves.”

“Even if it’s empty land, I’ll return the same day. I don’t want any economic guarantees.”

Blurred Prospects for the Future

The future for Artsakh residents is vague, accompanied by uncertainty and psychological pressure.

“I don’t know where I’ll live... what kind of home can you buy with 3 million (referring to the state credit support – ed.)?”

“I don’t sleep all night - what will we become, where will we go?”

However, some Artsakh residents are trying to self-organize and carry out activities in Armenia. A resident of Martuni city stated:

“I want to gather the people of the entire region, open something like a municipality... to try to unite the people of Martuni.”

The same respondent noted that he plans to participate in an international forum to raise the issues of his community.

The majority of Artsakh residents have no clear plans for the next one to two years. Making plans for the future is difficult due to instability and uncertainty.

“We’ve seen so much that we can’t make plans for the future, because we don’t know what our next day will be like.”

“For now, you don’t want to plan anything. As long as you work for the day, eat for the day.”

“We live day to day, we can’t even take one step forward.”

“If there were land, you could raise livestock, create something... but for what? For whose sake?”

The picture of hopelessness is deepened by distrust toward the authorities of the Republic of Armenia.

“No plans. What plans? Yesterday I heard they’re giving away four villages...”

For many, the primary goal is having their own roof over their heads.

“If we just had a home - that’s the big problem.”

“I love nature - Tavush, Lori regions. Maybe it will work out to build a house there.”

“The house is cramped, damp. Just let there be a house.”

“If there were housing support, people would stay in our country until the Karabakh issue is resolved.”

Some respondents try to start life anew, even against the background of painful losses. One respondent said that after her husband went missing, she decided to continue the family.

“We had embryos in the hospital. Yesterday I went, they implanted two... it’s his blood, my husband’s blood, he’ll be happy about it when he comes.”

Emigration Sentiments

Although most Artsakh residents want to remain in the Republic of Armenia, some are considering emigration, again due to material reasons.

“When the weather gets better, maybe they’ll leave here, go...”

“We all want to stay in Armenia, but if there are no material means, we’ll have to go there.”

“If there’s an opportunity, why not - yes.”

“There are no plans to leave Armenia. But if there are better conditions in another country...”

“My daughter is in 12th grade. If she graduates, gets accepted where she wants, we probably won’t stay here. We’ll move to Russia, to my husband and son.”

“My son and husband went to Russia - to see if they can find some kind of work.”

Conclusions

1. Life of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions

As a result of the blockade initiated by Azerbaijan in December 2022, the Armenian population of Artsakh faced numerous hardships that gradually intensified in May–June 2023. A widespread humanitarian crisis emerged in Artsakh, encompassing all spheres of life.

Restrictions on food, electricity, heating, communications, fuel, transportation, medical care, and medicines were particularly acute, leading to psychological stress, malnutrition and hunger, inadequate heating, violations of the rights to health care and education, and a significant limitation of contact with the outside world.

During the blockade, the population faced severe psychological pressure caused by fears for personal safety and uncertainty about the future. During this period, people were forced to adapt to extreme conditions that often resembled a struggle for survival. Various forms of self-help, mutual assistance, and resilience were employed; however, the overall mood was characterized by uncertainty and despair.

These facts indicate a deliberate and systematic policy by Azerbaijan aimed at the physical and psychological exhaustion of the Armenians of Artsakh and, by eliminating the minimum conditions for subsistence, the ethnic cleansing of the permanent population.

2. The Security Environment under Blockade Conditions

Life in Artsakh under blockade conditions was characterized by extremely difficult circumstances, including constant threats to physical security, severe psychological pressure, and an acute shortage of basic means of subsistence. Residents lived in a state of constant tension, without a clear vision of their future.

In border villages, the situation was even more severe, as residents were under direct threat, subjected to gunfire, threats, and other acts of violence. The psychological pressure methods employed by the Azerbaijani side, from threats to gunfire, contributed to growing fear and despair among the population.

The activities of Russian peacekeepers were unable to fully ensure the security of the population, leading to additional dissatisfaction. The authorities of Artsakh also faced accusations from the population of inaction.

All these factors made normal life in Artsakh impossible for the majority of the population, ultimately leading to mass and forced displacement.

3. Preparation and Launch of the Attack of September 19, 2023

Testimonies obtained from respondents clearly show that the Azerbaijani attack of September 19, 2023 was by no means accidental or spontaneous, but rather a comprehensive complex of clearly planned and well-organized military operations. It was the result of Azerbaijan's deliberate policy aimed at depopulating Artsakh of Armenians.

The prolonged blockade, provocative actions by the Azerbaijani side, the use of psychological influence methods, regular ceasefire violations, and frequent declarations of "combat readiness number one" created a tense situation in the region, indicating the likelihood of military action. Residents of border villages, in particular, sensing the full gravity of the situation, anticipated the danger.

The attack not only caused serious damage to Artsakh but also inflicted deep emotional trauma, especially among those who were unprepared for such a development of events.

Testimonies regarding interactions between Russian peacekeepers and Azerbaijani forces raise questions about their effectiveness and their failure to prevent the escalation of the conflict. The peacekeepers' contradictory actions cast doubt on their neutrality and their ability to fulfill their mandated tasks.

4. Shelter Conditions for the Civilian Population during the September 19 Attack

During the September 19 attack, the population of Artsakh attempted to ensure their safety in various ways, taking shelter in basements, schools, forests, and other locations. Most shelters were inadequate and unsuitable, characterized by dampness, cold, limited amenities, and the absence of sanitation facilities. The size of shelters was also extremely insufficient for accommodating several dozen people over multiple days.

Due to inadequate living and safety conditions in shelters, as well as the need to procure food, people were forced to frequently change shelter locations, exposing themselves to security risks during movement.

Shortages of food and medicines, along with the absence of electricity and communications, compounded the hardships. The majority experienced severe psychological distress, especially children and those with family members serving in the military.

Fear of violence and torture by Azerbaijanis was widespread.

Despite the difficulties, people demonstrated mutual assistance and solidarity.

5. Evacuation of the Civilian Population in September 2023

The process of civilians leaving shelters was fraught with risks to life and health. In different settlements, it proceeded in varying ways and at different speeds.

The evacuation from permanent places of residence also lacked a unified and clear approach and was accompanied by organizational difficulties. Residents were forced to

independently overcome the lack of transportation and fuel, prolonged travel, and severe emotional distress.

During the evacuation, almost no one felt a basic sense of safety or security. Azerbaijani armed forces controlling evacuation routes posed physical and psychological threats to civilians. Vehicle searches were conducted, and humiliating remarks toward Armenians were made. Azerbaijani servicemen did not hide their main goal: for Artsakh residents to leave their settlements, and subsequently Artsakh, as quickly as possible. To this end, they sometimes even “assisted” evacuees.

Evacuating civilians were subjected to direct attacks (through gunfire) and shelling. Medical assistance was practically nonexistent.

The living conditions of those evacuated from permanent residences and accommodated in the capital and at the nearby airport were extremely inadequate and hazardous to health. The density of people in enclosed spaces exceeded all possible limits, and the distribution of food and water was insufficient and poorly organized. People suffered from dampness and poor sanitary conditions. Some of those sheltering at Stepanakert airport were forced to spend the night outdoors.

6. Consequences of the September 2023 Attack for Life and Health

As a result of Azerbaijan’s military attack launched on September 19, 2023, the territory of Artsakh was subjected to bombardment of unprecedented intensity. Unlike the 2020 war, the strikes this time were more concentrated and intense. As a result, the civilian population of Artsakh faced numerous threats to life and health. There were casualties and injuries both from direct bombardments and from deliberate acts of violence, while access to medical assistance was extremely limited.

Civilian casualties were recorded mainly as a result of shelling. Some occurred while people were bringing food, heading to shelters, or simply leaving their homes. According to eyewitness accounts, victims included elderly persons, women, and children.

Deliberate killings by the Azerbaijani armed forces were also recorded. These cases included beheadings, killings by firearms and sharp objects, as well as rape and mutilation - acts that, from the perspective of international law, may qualify as war crimes.

Civilians sustained injuries both directly from hostilities - such as shrapnel wounds - and indirectly due to other factors (for example, deterioration of health in panic situations, fainting, or other injuries).

Medical assistance for civilians was almost inaccessible due to doctors’ overload, shortages of medicines, and communication disruptions. Many residents attempted self-treatment using available means.

The organization of funerals for the deceased and those killed was carried out under emergency conditions. Bodies were often kept in public places due to the absence of morgues, and coffins were made from available materials.

The comparison of official and unofficial assessments allows the conclusion that as a result of the September 2023 attack there were at least:

- 223 fatalities (at least 20 civilians), including 6 minors;
- more than 100 wounded.

7. Missing and Captured Persons as a Result of the September 2023 Attack

As a result of the September 2023 attack, many civilians and military personnel went missing or were presumably captured.

Disappearances were linked to hostilities, panic during evacuation, as well as the explosion at a fuel depot near Stepanakert.

Disappearance cases generally concerned individuals last seen at combat positions or civilians who had mobility difficulties due to health issues.

The Red Cross has confirmed the captivity of some missing persons. Some captives were later returned, but the whereabouts of a number of individuals remain unknown.

8. Impact of the September 2023 Attack on Settlements, State and Community Property, and Civilian Life

The attack launched against Artsakh on September 19, 2023 marked a new phase of an acute humanitarian crisis, striking the population's livelihood, infrastructure, and settlements.

From the first days of the attack, daily life was disrupted: schools, state bodies, and other services ceased operations. Disruptions in electricity and water supply limited hygienic and living conditions.

The disruption of communications (telephone, internet) created deep psychological tension due to lack of information and uncertainty for families.

Despite the relatively short duration of the attack, significant damage was recorded in several settlements, especially in the Martuni and Martakert regions. Damage affected not only residential homes but also offices, shops, vehicles, and household appliances. Many residents were unable to assess the damage due to security priorities.

Power grids, internet connections, water supply systems, and public buildings were targeted. A number of schools, kindergartens, and sports facilities were damaged, sometimes the same sites that had been targeted during the 2020 war.

Although in limited numbers, deliberate damage to spiritual and cultural sites was also recorded, including churches, monuments, and cemeteries.

The targeting of Stepanakert's Holy Cross Church, the Yeghishe Monastery of Chartar, the Martuni church, and several cemeteries had a pronounced negative impact on the population's psychological state. Those forcibly displaced spoke of deep pain, loss, and trauma, often avoiding images that revived memories.

The September attack was not only a military action but also created a large-scale humanitarian, socio-psychological, and cultural crisis aimed at destabilizing all aspects of civilian life.

9. Forced Displacement of the Population from Artsakh

The forced displacement of Artsakh residents was mass and coercive in nature. The reasons for leaving the homeland included the lack of overall security, predictability of the future, and a sense of safety; the absence of protection by Artsakh's state institutions, Russian peacekeepers, and Armenia; the presence of Azerbaijani forces and the resulting fear of reprisals and ethnic cleansing.

Reports of killings and torture also spread, deepening panic and significantly influencing the decision to leave.

The journey from Artsakh to Armenia took on average two or more days. People slept in their vehicles without sufficient food, water, or fuel. Traffic jams (especially in the Shushi hairpin turns and near the Stepanakert bridge) and harsh weather conditions led to physical suffering, worsening health conditions, and dozens of deaths.

Artsakh residents describe the displacement as severe psychological trauma and suffering; people felt “zombified” or “robotized.” Throughout the journey, they cried continuously in panic due to uncertainty and a sense of loss.

Children were the most vulnerable, due to hunger, cold, and lack of hygienic conditions.

Near the Hakari Bridge, Azerbaijanis conducted checks and inspections and displayed humiliating behavior toward Artsakh residents. Numerous insults, threats, and degrading remarks were voiced, and incidents of violence - pushing, blows, beatings - occurred. Men were taken out of vehicles, photographed or filmed, phones were checked, and passports inspected.

There were also confiscations of jewelry and valuables. Nearly the entire population left Artsakh. Only elderly, sick, or socially isolated individuals remained.

Thus, the departure of Artsakh residents was not voluntary but forced and coercive, driven by the absence of basic security conditions and by physical and psychological pressure. The displacement caused both material and human losses, as well as deep psychological trauma.

10. Loss of Private Property as a Result of the Forced Displacement of the Population of Artsakh

Following the September 2023 attack and the subsequent forced displacement, Artsakh residents suffered unprecedented property losses. In panic conditions, it was often impossible to bring even basic necessities to Armenia. Thousands of families left behind all their property in Artsakh - apartments, houses, adjacent land plots, garages, shops, warehouses, and other income-

generating spaces. Many families lost multiple properties simultaneously, including both residential and business premises.

The primary sources of income for hundreds of families remained in Artsakh - tractors, combine harvesters, trucks, and passenger vehicles. These were not transported due to lack of fuel or the need for rapid evacuation. For families engaged in agriculture, this constituted an extremely severe economic blow.

Families left behind furniture, household appliances, equipment, as well as valuables and monetary savings. Often, due to panic or anxiety, people did not take even personal jewelry or cash savings. Some deliberately avoided taking valuables to prevent security issues at Azerbaijani checkpoints.

Cultivated lands and income-generating orchards remained under Azerbaijani control. Thousands of head of cattle and other livestock, as well as hundreds of beehives, were left behind. Dozens of people were forced to abandon their pets - dogs and cats. Intangible values also remained in Artsakh: family photographs, works of art, and other creative works.

Respondents later saw their homes, equipment, beehives, and orchards in videos circulated online, noting their looted state or alterations resulting from Azerbaijani interference. Satellite images recorded the absence of abandoned agricultural machinery, while videos showed Azerbaijanis using Armenian property.

Dozens of families failed to take passports, medical, and other important documents. Others chose to burn or discard documents to avoid Azerbaijani checks at checkpoints.

The described losses represent not only material but also spiritual and historical value for families. The loss of property is not merely an economic fact but a symbol of the violation of identity, memory, and the right to a home. As a result of property loss, the customary cultural way of life has been disrupted or completely destroyed.

11. Subsequent Life of Artsakh Residents in the Republic of Armenia

The process of seeking refuge and recovery in Armenia for those forcibly displaced from Artsakh is characterized by uncertainty, social difficulties, and severe psychological distress.

Initially, Artsakh residents were accommodated in hotels, schools, cultural centers, or the apartments of citizens who showed goodwill. Conditions were often limited - overcrowded rooms, lack of heating, and inadequate hygienic conditions. Over time, many began paying rent, which became an additional financial burden.

Finding employment is the most difficult problem. Previous professional experience is often not in demand in the new environment, while physical, age-related, and health limitations hinder employment. For many families, the only income is state assistance - 50,000 drams per person.

The consequences of displacement - stress, fears, insomnia, and a sense of uncertainty - persist. Many have not overcome the pain of loss and frequently recall their abandoned homes,

graves, and relatives. Heart and respiratory illnesses are widespread. Children are still afraid of loud noises and possible attacks by Azerbaijanis.

Despite support from many Armenians in Armenia, in some places Artsakh residents have faced insulting remarks (“You sold Karabakh”), deepening feelings of alienation. Most Artsakh residents wish to return to their homeland if security is ensured and the presence of Azerbaijanis is excluded. They demand security guarantees or international peacekeepers, though many do not trust any peacekeeping force. Return is also linked to the restoration of Artsakh’s sovereignty and army.

The majority view the future as uncertain and live day to day. A common dream is to have one’s own home or apartment.

Some, due to material reasons, intend to emigrate, mainly to Russia (where relatives or family members reside).

Legal Assessment

1. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh under Blockade Conditions

The blockade imposed by Azerbaijan on Artsakh constitutes a gross violation of international law, including international human rights law and humanitarian law. The blockade, which lasted for approximately nine months, was in its substance and consequences the result of a systematic policy aimed at the physical and psychological exhaustion of the Armenian population of Artsakh, who were deliberately deprived of resources essential for survival - food, water, medical care, fuel, and other resources - as well as education and contact with the outside world.

The humanitarian crisis resulting from the blockade carried out by Azerbaijan is multifaceted; it grossly violates fundamental rights and humanitarian principles enshrined in a number of international conventions. Azerbaijan not only ignored its obligations under the Geneva Conventions, UN international human rights treaties, and other legal instruments, but also deliberately facilitated the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Artsakh by eliminating the minimum conditions necessary for subsistence.

Azerbaijan also failed to comply with the decision of the International Court of Justice of February 2023 on the application of provisional measures, which required ensuring the free movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo through the Lachin Corridor. The blockade itself contradicts this decision and constitutes a violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The actions of Azerbaijan have resulted in mass violations of the legal norms established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

As a result of the blockade, the entire Armenian population of Artsakh was targeted as an ethnic group and subjected to deliberate pressure and suffering, in violation of the principle of non-discrimination and the obligation to respect human dignity. For nearly nine months, restrictions and the suspension of humanitarian and commercial supplies subjected the population to hunger and malnutrition; gas and electricity supplies were cut off; access to water was blocked; and the normal functioning of transport and communications was disrupted. All of this led to a gross violation of the civilian population of Artsakh's rights to an adequate standard of living and to health. The deliberate restriction of essential means of survival and the intentional creation of famine constitute war crimes, as starvation was used as a method of warfare, prohibited under international humanitarian law.

During the blockade, shootings were also recorded against civilians, including farmers, drivers, and residents of border villages, which grossly violated the right to life and created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Through a combination of threats, psychological pressure, and deliberate shootings, a situation was created that in its essence was aimed at terrorizing the civilian population. Severe psychological pressure caused by hunger, constant fear, and isolation had a particularly profound impact on children, the elderly, and persons with health problems, for whom neither psychological nor psychiatric services were provided.

Restrictions on access to medicines, medical assistance, and medical services led to the worsening of diseases, the impossibility of surgical interventions, and preventable deaths. These developments violated the right to life as well as the right to the highest attainable standard of health. In conditions of electricity and heating outages, schools and other educational institutions did not operate, resulting in the disruption of the realization of the right to education.

Through the blockade, Azerbaijan created an environment of constant terror and uncertainty, instilled fear, and sought to break the will of the population of Artsakh and force them to leave their places of residence. This policy led to violations of the prohibition of collective punishment, disregard for the prohibition on terrorizing the civilian population, and infringement of the right to personal security, given the absence of any real protection and security guarantees under blockade conditions.

In addition, arbitrary shootings carried out by Azerbaijan against civilian infrastructure - roads, power supply lines, and vehicles - endangered vital services and the survival of the civilian population. This obstructed the delivery of humanitarian aid, while restrictions on the activities of the Red Cross and peacekeepers and the blocking of cargo entry during the nine months of the blockade grossly violated the right of the Armenian population of Artsakh to receive assistance from the outside world.

2. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh during the Military Operations Initiated by Azerbaijan in September 2023

The military attack launched by Azerbaijan against Artsakh on September 19, 2023 was the result of premeditated, coordinated, and targeted actions, accompanied not only by armed

attacks but also by the systematic terrorization of the civilian population and the use of psychological pressure. This phase of military operations resulted in gross violations of both international human rights law and international humanitarian law, relating to obligations to protect the rights to life, liberty, personal security, dignity, health, and the rights of children.

Azerbaijan widely employed methods of psychological terror through threats and calls broadcast via loudspeakers, fear-inducing messages disseminated on social networks, and constant noise generated by unmanned aerial vehicles. These actions, combined with the extremely inadequate conditions of shelters (dampness, cold, lack of sanitary standards, overcrowding), created a situation that, from a legal perspective, reaches the threshold of a violation of the prohibition of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Physical and psychological violence, humiliating speech and treatment inflicted on civilians by servicemen along evacuation routes, as well as the confiscation of personal belongings, including religious symbols, contradict minimum humanitarian guarantees and the rules of international humanitarian law that prohibit the use of force and violence for the purpose of terrorizing civilians.

The deliberate targeting of the civilian population through shelling and drone strikes on villages, residential neighborhoods, schools, and other civilian objects resulted in numerous fatalities and injuries. Among the victims were women, children, and elderly persons, including at times when they were attempting to reach shelters, had gone out to obtain food or medicines, or were simply in the vicinity of their homes. These actions grossly violated the rights to life and personal security and do not comply with the requirements of international humanitarian law regarding the general protection of civilians and the principle of distinction.

Forced movement between shelters under fire, the need to risk one's life to secure basic necessities, and the lack of organization of the evacuation process led to a situation in which the civilian population was constantly exposed to a clear risk of death and serious injury. This is incompatible with the principles of precaution, warning, and proportionality enshrined in the applicable norms of international humanitarian law.

Military operations severely undermined the realization of children's rights. Explosions and shelling, when children were at schools or forced to hide in basements, disrupted their normal development and the preservation of their mental health, creating deep and long-lasting traumatic consequences. Cases of children's deaths, including from cardiac arrest, panic, or the inability to reach shelters, testify to a gross violation of obligations to provide special protection to children. This situation contradicts the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to the rights to life, survival, development, and special protection in situations of armed conflict.

During this period, the Armenian population of Artsakh was under severe psychological and physical pressure. Constant fear, uncertainty, a sense of hunger and isolation, as well as the absence of responsible authority, profoundly undermined people's mental health. The absence of psychological and psychiatric services, the overload of the healthcare system, and the actual failure to provide timely medical assistance to the wounded contradict both the state's obligations to ensure the right to health and the requirements of international humanitarian law concerning the protection of the wounded and sick.

Throughout the September military operations, the entire population of Artsakh was effectively deprived of safe and adequate shelters. People were forced to spend nights in basements, garages, forests, and animal shelters. The absence of protected shelters and of organized, safe, and predictable evacuation mechanisms became a means of collective pressure and punishment, which contradicts the norms of international humanitarian law on the prohibition of collective punishment and the prohibition of terrorizing the civilian population.

Significant disruptions to electricity supply, water supply, and communications, as well as damage to hospitals, schools, kindergartens, and other civilian objects, violated the fundamental principles of the protection of civilian infrastructure and civilian property. Strikes were carried out against objects that had no direct military significance, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

In addition, the detention of civilians by Azerbaijani forces, their forcible transfer, interrogation, and in some cases enforced disappearance violated the rights to liberty and personal integrity, as well as international norms concerning the protection of civilians and prisoners of war. Particularly alarming are cases in which elderly and disabled persons were left abandoned or fell under the control of Azerbaijani forces without any special protective or care measures, contrary to the requirement of special treatment for vulnerable groups.

Thus, during the September 2023 aggression, the actions carried out by Azerbaijan led to gross and systematic violations of the rights of the population of Artsakh to life, personal security, dignity, health, and the rights of children and other vulnerable groups.

3. Violations of the Rights of the Population of Artsakh as a Result of Forced Displacement

The large-scale forced displacement of the population of Artsakh that followed the blockade and military attack constitutes, from the perspective of international law, a gross violation of a number of fundamental human rights norms. The displacement was not voluntary; it was caused by immediate fear, the absence of security, a humanitarian crisis, and real threats to life and health.

In the hairpin turns of Shushi and in the area of the Stepanakert bridge, under conditions of prolonged traffic jams and the absence of food, water, and fuel, people remained on the roads for days. As a result, dozens of individuals died or suffered serious health damage. These circumstances directly violated the right to life and the right to be free from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, as Azerbaijan, through its targeted policy and specific actions, created foreseeable conditions of death and severe suffering.

During the displacement, many displaced persons were subjected to humiliating and disrespectful treatment, expressed through insults, threats, physical violence, and forced searches. Incidents recorded especially near the Hakari Bridge, directed exclusively against Armenians of Artsakh as an ethnic group, demonstrate discriminatory treatment and contradict international standards of the right to be free from discrimination and to respect for human dignity.

The displacement process severely undermined the exercise of the right to property. Numerous cases of confiscation of personal property, monetary funds, and valuables were

recorded, carried out without any legal basis. The loss of apartments, houses, land plots, agricultural machinery, vehicles, animals, and other property, as well as their appropriation or deliberate destruction, constitute gross violations of the right to property. In the context of armed conflict, the confiscation or destruction of civilian housing, land, and private property contradicts the norms of international humanitarian law that prohibit the arbitrary destruction or appropriation of civilian property unless required by imperative military necessity.

During the displacement, which lasted two or more days, people were significantly deprived of medical assistance, medicines, and basic hygienic conditions. Elderly and sick persons did not receive necessary medical care; some were forced to use injectable medicines as substitutes for tablets, while children's health deteriorated due to hunger, cold, and stress. This violates the rights to health and medical care as enshrined in both human rights and international humanitarian law instruments.

The impact on children was particularly severe. They were subjected to hunger, lived in conditions that did not meet basic living standards, and remained in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. As a result, children's rights to life, health, education, and protection, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, were violated. War trauma, the experience of displacement, and deep uncertainty about the future have left long-term psychological scars requiring professional intervention, while access to appropriate services was extremely limited.

Throughout the displacement process, the right to freedom of movement was effectively restricted. Roads were under Azerbaijani control, strict searches and document checks were carried out, as a result of which the population was deprived of the ability to move by its own decision and in a safe manner.

Displaced persons who found refuge in Armenia continue to live in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty due to the unpredictability of the future.

During the initial phase of resettlement in Armenia, living conditions in hotels, schools, cultural centers, and other temporary shelters (overcrowding, lack of adequate heating and hygienic conditions) did not meet the minimum standards of a dignified life.

Currently, many, having limited incomes, are forced to pay rent, which deepens socio-economic vulnerability.

Despite the fact that part of Armenian society has provided significant support, displaced persons in certain environments have also faced alienation, insulting expressions, and stigmatization, which undermined their dignity and contributed to the deepening of discriminatory attitudes.

A significant portion of displaced persons is unable to find employment due to the lack of demand for their professional experience, linguistic (dialectal), age-related, or health limitations, as well as objective difficulties in the labor market. This hinders their social integration and the restoration of normal life. As a result of displacement and war, there has been a noticeable increase in cardiovascular, respiratory, and psychological illnesses among the population; children have developed fears, traumatic memories, and behavioral problems, while access to healthcare and psychological support remains insufficient. All of this violates the right to health and further

confirms that forced displacement has created not only physical but also a profound socio-psychological crisis for the population of Artsakh.