

Armenian Experiences of Refugee Resettlement in the Context of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020)

The Nagorno-Karabakh War was a dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning the region of Nagorno-Karabakh (referred to as Artsakh) and seven nearby districts. This territorial and ethnic conflict centered around the fact that the region is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Armenians, while the neighboring areas were mainly populated by Azerbaijanis until they were evacuated during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, which occurred between 1988-1994. Although the conflict dates back to the early 1900s, it resurfaced in 1988 when ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh called for the region to be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan began as a full-blown war in the early 1990s and later de-escalated to a low-intensity conflict until it resurfaced in April 2016 during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, also referred to as the April War, Four-Day War, or April Clashes. Four years later, in September 2020, it erupted into a full-scale war, known as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, or the Forty-Four-Day War. As a result of the consistent military clashes, a significant number of ethnic Armenians were forced to leave Nagorno-Karabakh. The recent intensification of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 led to the mass exodus of around 91,000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia, consisting of mostly women, elderly, and children.¹

The relevance of exploring the experiences of refugees is apparent in light of continuing aggression of Azerbaijan towards Armenia, resulting in human rights violations of the civilian population in the targeted borderline communities. According to a report by the Office of Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia on September 16, 2022, approximately 7,600 Armenians were forced to abandon their homes in the Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, and Syunik

provinces of Armenia due to the military attack by the Azerbaijani army on those borderline regions of Armenia.²

Historic Background

Nagorno-Karabakh, a 4,400 km² mountainous region in the Caucasus, was primarily inhabited by ethnic Armenians but was officially part of Azerbaijan. Despite declaring independence, it remains unrecognized globally.³ Both Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars have invoked history to justify their claims. Armenians argue Nagorno-Karabakh has been part of “Greater Armenia” for over 2,500 years, while Azeris claim Turkish-speaking people were the majority until the nineteenth century, when Russian colonial policies resettled Armenians after the Russo-Persian War in 1828, the Crimean War, and the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

In the early 1920s, Soviet administration boundaries included a majority of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Initially, the region was to be part of Soviet Armenia, but in July 1921, Stalin redirected it to Azerbaijan as an autonomous region.⁴ Violence erupted in 1988 during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, displacing both Armenians and Azeris. Igor Babanov claims Gorbachev’s Central Committee approved violence against Armenians, prompting further Armenian refugees to flee.⁵ Stalin’s population transfers are a clear case of state-led ethnic cleansing.⁶

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War lasted until 1994, during which Armenians gained control of the enclave and nearby Azerbaijani territories, including the Lachin Corridor, linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. A Russia-mediated ceasefire was reached in May 1994, though intermittent border conflicts have continued.⁷ In April 2016, the conflict escalated during the Four-Day War, with the most significant escalation in 2020 during the Second Nagorno-

Karabakh War, marking a major intensification of the long-standing dispute between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Refugee Resettlement

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees are “people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety.”⁸ Refugee movements are driven by conflict, state failure, and global inequalities, and have been linked to terrorism, transnationalism, and security concerns. This raises questions about international cooperation and the role of institutions and laws.⁹ Internal displacement is increasingly recognized, with emerging norms governing states’ treatment of displaced people, though this has been contentious.¹⁰ After World War II, internally displaced persons were seen as a sovereignty issue, but by the late 1980s, international organizations and NGOs pushed for global responses, leading to the establishment of a UN office to address the issue.

Following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenian refugees had migration options, with many returning home due to Armenia’s military superiority. However, refugees from Azerbaijan and northern Nagorno-Karabakh have been unable to return due to the unresolved conflict. Ethnic Armenian refugees fled to Armenia, considered their ancestral homeland, despite many having never lived there. During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenia’s Public Health Working Group raised concerns about the health of newly displaced Armenians. The pandemic, conflict, and overcrowding in homes led to a surge in COVID-19 cases in Nagorno-Karabakh, overwhelming healthcare facilities. Medical staff in Stepanakert continued working despite shortages, but many became infected, worsening both the health and humanitarian crises.¹¹

Refugee Rehabilitation

Since the 1990s, the Nagorno-Karabakh War has displaced approximately 360,000 people from Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan to Armenia. Despite a ceasefire in 1994, no lasting resolution has been reached, leaving many still displaced. While the Armenian government has simplified citizenship procedures for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, many refugees remain in refugee status or have left the country. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War worsened the situation, with more Nagorno-Karabakh civilians fleeing to Armenia due to border conflicts and geopolitical tensions. Azerbaijan's control over territories and actions, like cutting Nagorno-Karabakh's gas supplies in 2022, have forced further evacuations of local Armenians. Currently, 20,433 displaced Artsakh Armenians live in Armenia under refugee-like conditions.¹²

However, Armenia has limited programs for refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. One initiative by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs offers mortgage assistance to displaced families. About 98.5 percent of eligible people who lost property in Nagorno-Karabakh will receive 25,000 AMD (~61 USD) for adults and 50,000 AMD (~122 USD) for children and disabled persons.¹³

Warren Haffar, a professor recognized for his expertise in conflict resolution and refugee studies, discusses the adverse effects that increasing refugee populations have on both the refugees themselves and the host communities. Whether refugees are repatriated, resettled, or integrated, improving their quality of life requires significant adjustments.¹⁴ He stresses that addressing the refugee crisis needs strong community collaboration, and the UNHCR has begun incorporating participatory planning through refugee-community partnerships, including security measures like neighborhood watch teams.¹⁵ Associate Professor of Politics and International

Studies, Maria Koinova adds that maintaining the dignity of refugees is essential for empowering their autonomy.¹⁶

Thomas Felke, an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work, applies social identity and acculturation theories to examine what influences refugees' decisions about citizenship. His study reveals that factors like housing and employment hold greater significance for refugees than their immigration status. The most significant barrier to integration was the refugees' lack of language skills, and Armenia's economic struggles and mandatory military service further deterred them from seeking citizenship.¹⁷ He argues that sustainable support and careful policy planning are crucial for managing prolonged refugee situations. Diasporas can also play a role in refugee integration, but their impact depends on factors like size, influence, and involvement in peace efforts.¹⁸

Research into the experiences of Armenian refugees is limited, focusing mostly on quantitative data, while subjective experiences are underexplored. Further research is needed to address this gap and understand the complex challenges facing displaced Armenians. This would also provide insights into other global refugee crises, such as the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite some governmental support for refugees, long-term solutions are lacking, and further investigation is needed to evaluate Armenia's policies and their effectiveness in practice.

Methodology

This research aims to explore the experiences of Armenian refugees who have fled their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh due to the war against Azerbaijan in 2020. Due to the recent nature of the events and the overwhelming majority of the available data being compiled in quantitative reports by humanitarian organizations and not from the perspective of the refugees, this exploratory pilot study will learn more about the specific challenges Armenian refugees face,

their feelings, their expectations of the government, their understanding of the situation, and many other intangible aspects of their experience that have not been studied before. This study will give insight into the present needs of refugees and show how humanitarian and social groups might better assist them.

This research aims to examine the primary research question, what was the impact of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war on the Armenian refugees? This study also asks, how has this displacement, both internal and external, influenced the lives of refugees who fled Nagorno-Karabakh over the years? How are the resources available to them as refugees contributing to their adjustment to a new life? What steps can be taken to prevent humanitarian crises, such as Nagorno-Karabakh's refugee displacement? To address these questions, this paper utilizes interpretivist research, which depends on questioning and observation to uncover or develop a thorough and profound understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This is closely linked with qualitative approaches to gathering data.

Participants

Participants will be Armenian refugees who have fled the region of Nagorno-Karabakh due to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and recent conflicts that have happened there. The research will be conducted only with individuals who meet the legal definition of adulthood both in the US and Armenia, which is eighteen and over.

Sampling Methods

The term "sample" in quantitative research refers to a "systematic random probability sample," which is a sample taken from a population in which each and every element has a statistically equal chance of being chosen.¹⁹ Yet in interpretivist research, the researcher seeks to

identify the relevant categories at play, “not the distribution of some larger population across categories that we have a priori chosen.”²⁰

This research will first utilize purposive sampling to gain the most accurate participant pool since this is a non-probability sampling technique in which units are chosen because they hold qualities that the particular research sample needs. Being an Armenian refugee from the Nagorno-Karabakh War is the characteristic in question here. Purposive sampling will be most useful in order to collect a representative yet diverse sample for qualitative studies, as discussed by Nigel King, Christine Horrocks, and Joanna Brooks in their book *Interviews in Qualitative Research*.²¹ This approach does not attempt to generalize to the larger population of all refugees but to understand aspects of the refugee experiences and struggles due to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War that the researcher is investigating.²²

Secondly, to sample the population for this study, snowball sampling will be conducted, utilizing the local contacts to begin connections with refugees. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure that is “appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate, such as homeless individuals, migrant workers, or undocumented immigrants.”²³ In snowball sampling, the researcher gathers data on the few target population participants he or she can locate, then asks them for the information needed to find any further participants they may know. Snowball sampling was utilized by sociologist-researchers Karen Farquharson (2005) and Mary Romero (1992) when studying tobacco policymakers in Australia and Chicana domestic workers in Colorado respectively in their social research as they both discovered networks that could not have been identified from the general population.²⁴ Therefore, the snowball sampling method is best suited for this exploratory research on

Armenian refugees as the researcher has access to the refugee community thanks to local connections.

As refugees complete the interviews, the researcher will ask them to provide information regarding other refugees who have fled the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zones. The researcher will then recruit based on who they believe might be interested in providing the research with more data. The number of interview participants will depend upon “saturation”—the researcher’s sense that he or she has enough information, rather than a sample size necessary to meet statistical significance.²⁵ The researcher will know when the point of saturation has been reached when interviews are repeating the same information, and no new information is being introduced.

Recruitment Strategies

The researcher will get in touch with local contacts who will provide names and contact information of refugees they know, who have fled from Nagorno Karabakh. The researcher will then use this contact information to send recruitment emails to collect participants for the study. There are no incentives offered to the participants.

The recruitment email will outline a summary of the study and its goals, the interview time requirements, as well as a disclaimer clause for liability purposes. Further, the recruitment email will ask the participant to provide an interview time and platform (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom, etc.) that is most convenient to them. Recruitment emails will be sent out one day following IRB approval, and the interviews conducted within two weeks following participant confirmation.

Procedures

The interview process itself will be conducted in the Armenian language, to better and more accurately allow participants to communicate their experiences. Any related documentation to the interview, such as but not limited to the recruitment email and consent scripts will also be translated into Armenian. Informed consent will be obtained during the interview period through an oral script outlining the risks and benefits of the study and that the interview will be recorded for transcription and storage purposes. Furthermore, the consent script will outline the types of questions that the study aims to answer and the expected outcomes of the study. Participants will also be notified that they can revoke their consent at any time without repercussion. Once the participant has affirmed their consent by a verbal agreement that will be video recorded for evidence, the researcher will ask them a series of twelve questions and probes designed by the researcher. The questionnaire aims to inquire about, but is not limited to: the refugees' demographics to learn where they grew up and lived in Nagorno-Karabakh prior to the war, their experiences with resettlement in Armenia, any particular difficulties they encountered, the sources of assistance offered that had an impact on their transition, and the refugees' plans for the future and the factors that influenced those decisions.

The interview will be semi-structured, primarily following pre-written questions and probes, though additional information/explanations may be requested of the participant. The researcher will attempt to stay under an hour per interview, withholding exceptions at the express consent of the participant should the interview go over time. The researcher will then follow up with these additional contacts to further populate the study and conduct further interviews until saturation has been reached. The interviews will be recorded directly to the researcher's computer. However, if the platform the participant chooses directly records to the cloud, initial

videos will be recorded through the platform of choice by the participant using the researcher's password-protected account. The recordings will then be downloaded and stored on a password-locked device and the original recording in the third-party platform will be deleted.

Recordings of the interview will be saved in a password-locked device that will be monitored by the researcher at all times. Documents that can reveal the identity of the participants will also be stored on this device. Aliases will replace the real names of participants in order to protect their anonymity during and after publication unless the participants express that they wish to disclose their real identities. The recordings and documents will be stored during publication and will be destroyed six months after the publication has been completed.

Data Analysis

In order to document the data collected from the interviews, the researcher will be utilizing full verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews because of the phenomenological nature of the research into the personal experiences of refugees. The researcher will transcribe the interviews using King, Horrocks, and Brooks' (2010) system of transcription. The entire interview will be transcribed in Armenian and later translated into English as necessary for the final report. The interview subjects will be offered a chance to review transcripts for clarity and understanding.

Due to the nature of the study, non-verbal communication will also be incorporated into the transcription to indicate how the refugees feel about various themes and concerns. Since the purpose of this study does not center on non-verbal communication itself, it will only be documented in instances when the researcher has recorded distinctive non-verbal communication that strongly reinforces meaning.²⁶ Carol Warren and Tracy Karner, sociologists known for their expertise in qualitative research methods, recommend that interviewers should be ready for

emotional reactions from interviewees, even if they assume that their questions are not emotionally stressful.²⁷ Based on Poland's (2002) transcription system, non-verbal communication will be noted in parentheses in the same transcription for transparency.

The researcher will use thematic analysis to examine the data and discover any recurring themes. In thematic analysis, King, Horrocks, and Brooks define themes as “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees relevant to the research question.”²⁸ As this research utilizes an interpretivist approach, the themes will be shaped based on the answers collected during the interviews.

Drawing on King, Horrocks, and Brooks’ three stages of thematic design, the researcher will first conduct descriptive coding by reading over each transcript, underlining pertinent information, adding succinct remarks, developing descriptive codes, and continuously improving them throughout this process. The researcher will then proceed to the second stage of thematic design, interpretive coding, which entails grouping descriptive codes, evaluating the significance of clusters in connection to the research topic and disciplinary perspective, and finally applying interpretative codes to the whole data set. Thematic analysis will conclude by identifying overarching themes. By considering interpretative themes from the theoretical and/or practical standpoint of the project, the researcher will generate key themes for the data set as a whole and then design a diagram to depict linkages across levels of coding in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis focused on the subjective experiences of Armenian refugees and identified six major themes. The first theme, “Insecurity through total displacement,” revealed that refugees experienced a sense of insecurity and instability due to their forced displacement. For some, they faced loss through the loss of their home due to the fact that their

neighborhoods were getting bombed, and others experienced the loss of valuable documents and monetary resources, as they were in a hurry to leave and left many of their valuables behind. They faced challenges in planning for their future and relocating with large families. Many families were faced with separation from their families. One interviewee told me that she was separated from her husband because he was still on duty at the border, but she had to take the rest of the family to safety. Thankfully, some of them were able to be reunited at the refugee camps, but the trauma of potentially, or even actually, losing loved ones left a mental toll on the refugees.

The second theme, “Lack of opportunities for rehabilitation,” highlighted that the refugees faced limitations based on their age, location, and skills. Age restrictions prevented them from starting new careers. Due to the upper age range of the interviewees, some faced difficulties because of a lack of necessary education while others faced difficulties because of a lack of openings. As an example, one interviewee said, “As a chemistry teacher, I took some of my teaching equipment with me when my family and I hastily left our home during the Artsakh War. However, I have been unable to secure a teaching position in Armenia.”²⁹

Additionally, location was an issue because the shift from rural communities and occupations was drastically changed to urban communities and occupations. Due to Armenia’s limited resources, many refugees had to seek shelter in the larger cities and therefore faced little to nothing in terms of occupations that were suited to their abilities. Finally, limited skills made the refugees reliant on agriculture and other related low-skill fields (e.g. baking, truck driving, etc.), making finding new job opportunities in cities, such as Yerevan, Dilijan, and Hrazdan, difficult, as cities in Armenia tend to have more service industries which the refugees are not qualified to perform.

The third theme, “Lack of continued humanitarian aid,” revealed that although refugees were initially provided with food, winter clothes, and blankets, the aid lasted only for the first few months of the war. Many refugees were forced to return home despite the instability because they could no longer afford to rent. One interviewee mentioned, “Due to the decrease in rental assistance, we cannot continue to rent a place in Yerevan. Therefore, even though we were afraid of the unstable situation in Artsakh, we had no other option but to return to our house which thankfully was still standing.”³⁰ Others were less fortunate, having little to no chance to repatriate due to their homes being in Azeri control within Artsakh, yet not being able to survive well in the camps due to the limited number of resources that are still being provided.

The fourth theme, “Impossibility of repatriation,” showed that refugees feared escalated conflict and feared attacks from certain areas. Cities that have been taken over under Azeri forces, such as Shushi, become forward bases for Azeri forces, scaring refugees from moving back to homes within that vicinity as escalated conflict would lead to them only losing their homes yet again. Furthermore, the capital of Artsakh, Stepanakert, lies merely four miles away from Shushi, meaning that if escalations were to continue, Stepanakert would not be safe for them to return. They also faced the challenge of their homes being left under Azerbaijan’s control, which made it impossible for them to return. Cities such as Hadrut, Karin Tak, and others remain under Azeri forces’ control, meaning that refugees who fled from these areas have no chance of returning to their homes, even if their homes were still standing.

The fifth theme, “Effect of the blockade of Lachin corridor,” revealed that refugees had no access to food or medical supplies due to the import of food and medicine being blocked. Lachin, being the only road into Artsakh from Armenia, is an important highway to bring supplies and medicine into Artsakh. This is a new development brought into the research as the

blockade only started on December 12, 2022, therefore, there is no literature on this subject.

However, many refugees stated that they were unable to return, leave, or, if they were trapped within the blockade, to get supplies to support themselves or their families. Additionally, this road was the only way for major trauma cases to go to larger hospitals in Armenia. Many hospitals in Artsakh have limited capacities to take care of wounded soldiers, refugees, and civilians, depriving the residents of Artsakh the ability to seek medical care in Armenia.

The final theme, “Subjective experience,” highlighted the views of refugees regarding the war. They felt hopeless and uncertain about their future. Some reasons that refugees stated for feeling hopeless are included in some of the themes that this paper has already discussed. They feel incapable of helping themselves and no one else in the world has responded to their continued need. While they are trying to continue living, the priorities of Armenia are focused on the national security aspect of maintaining the integrity of the borders, therefore reducing the amount of aid available to the refugees. Additionally, the continuously high tensions on the borders of Armenia and now-Azeri-controlled borders as well as Armenian-controlled Artsakh led to an overwhelming sense of uncertainty about the direction of this conflict. Many refugees have no idea, let alone plans, on how to continue living in their condition. Deprived of the chance to return and unable to continue living as refugees due to a lack of resources and opportunities, many refugees are completely in the dark about how their situation will play out over the next few years.

Overall, the qualitative data analysis provided valuable insights into the subjective experiences of Armenian refugees, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies. The themes identified can be used to inform policies and interventions that address the needs of refugees and promote their well-being.

The analysis answers the research question by providing a detailed description of the subjective experiences of refugees because of the Nagorno-Karabakh War. The six themes identified in the analysis provide insight into the impacts of the war on refugees in terms of their sense of safety and stability, job and rehabilitation opportunities, access to humanitarian aid, and the possibility of repatriation. The analysis also includes the effect of the blockade of the Lachin corridor on refugees and their subjective experiences regarding the war. Overall, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the Nagorno-Karabakh War on refugees by exploring their subjective experiences through interviews.

Future Research

According to the research findings, there are several avenues for future research to explore regarding the Artsakh refugee crisis. One possible area of inquiry is to investigate the types of aid that can provide more long-term benefits for these refugees in terms of rehabilitation. Another area of interest could be to explore how the refugee crisis can be utilized as a bargaining tool for peacekeeping purposes. Additionally, researchers could explore alternative means to improve the subjective experience of refugees, such as through creative or community-based interventions. Finally, the management of refugee policies could be prioritized in an unstable geopolitical location, and further research could investigate strategies for effectively managing such policies in these challenging circumstances. These research avenues have the potential to contribute valuable insights and recommendations for addressing the complex challenges facing Artsakh refugees and other displaced populations.

One of the most commonly stated challenges was the lack of continued support for the refugees. Future research needs to investigate how to spread out and distribute resources gained at the start of a conflict so that they can continue to be given out over a long period instead of just during the crisis. Understanding ways to mitigate bursts of aid so that they can help ensure

the future success of refugees is critical to providing care for refugees as the literature repeatedly contains scenarios where refugees are stuck with no way of repatriating or rehabilitating out of their situation. More research into long-term stockpiling of support is therefore key to combat this detrimental pattern of aid.

The Nagorno-Karabakh War has also led to various humanitarian crises, including the targeting of peaceful civilian settlements and the commission of war crimes by Azerbaijan. As a result, many refugees have been forced to flee their homes and lost access to necessities. Raising awareness about these crises could potentially incentivize major organizations to take action and prevent further harm to the refugee population in the affected area. This could involve pressuring the aggressor to refrain from committing inhumane acts and promoting peace negotiations to resolve territorial disputes and prevent fatal consequences for the displaced population.

For comparison, countries currently combat climate change by collectively implementing a carbon tax as a measure to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and reduce their carbon footprint. Similarly, countries can come together to use the humanitarian crisis of refugees as a tool to negotiate peace between warring countries by recognizing the importance of addressing the root causes of displacement and prioritizing the safety and well-being of affected populations. To achieve this, international actors can work towards providing aid and assistance to refugees and displaced persons, advocating for their rights and safety, and pressuring the warring parties to reach a peaceful resolution.

Moreover, the international community can use the presence of a significant refugee population as leverage in peace negotiations. For instance, major organizations can offer incentives such as aid, trade deals, or diplomatic recognition to parties that are willing to engage in negotiations and make efforts to facilitate the safe return of refugees to their homes. By using

the refugee crisis as a bargaining tool, parties to the conflict can be incentivized to prioritize the interests of civilians, work towards de-escalation, and take a step towards a peaceful resolution.

Furthermore, the refugees are experiencing feelings of hopelessness and fear due to the uncertainty surrounding their future. They have lost their homes and most of the land of Nagorno-Karabakh. Many families left the area with minimal or no belongings and are presently facing difficulties due to insufficient assistance and aid. As women and children sought safety in Armenia, men remained in Nagorno-Karabakh to protect the borders due to the constant threat of escalation. The situation is further exacerbated by the blockage of the only road to Nagorno-Karabakh, the Lachin Corridor, which has turned the region into an enclave and prevented refugees in Armenia from returning. These reasons understandably contribute to the refugees' sense of hopelessness and their belief that their situation may not improve. Nevertheless, there may be some ways to subjectively boost their spirits and morale, despite the defeat in the 2020 war and loss of everything.

An avenue this research can take in the future is the exploration of how to support refugees in a way that instills hope for their future may involve various subjective approaches. For instance, providing them with education and vocational training can equip them with the necessary skills to secure employment and build a better life. Additionally, offering mental health support and counseling can help refugees cope with the trauma they may have experienced and provide a sense of comfort and security. The suggestions provided are not exhaustive and their effectiveness is uncertain. Consequently, further investigation is necessary to determine the precise circumstances of the refugees to provide them with the most effective assistance, it may be necessary to implement a range of different subjective streams of support.

Finally, another recommendation for future research is how refugee support can be prioritized in an unstable geopolitical location. The government of Armenia is currently more concerned about national safety on the borders of the mainland of Armenia, thereby reducing humanitarian aid in their priorities within the political agenda. Further research can ask what the effects of prioritizing aid to refugees might have on the overall population. Morale is a key component in a sovereign nation's capacity to defend itself and if the displaced populace is being demoralized due to inaction from the government to support necessities, it may lower the nation's overall capacity to maintain its integrity from within.

An example of this may draw on the massive humanitarian aid that Ukraine is receiving throughout its conflict with Russia. Data regarding how the effects of well-supplied refugee populations can be correlated to morale and further determine its effect on the overall Ukrainian population in their efforts to defend their nation. Similar throughlines can be drawn for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and may further improve the refugee situation in that location.

Recommendations

The Forty-Four-Day War, known as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, that began on September 27, 2020, has upended the previous order in the South Caucasus, and it remains uncertain how the situation will evolve and whether a lasting agreement can be reached. The 1994 cease-fire, which ended the previous war, did not bring peace but rather left all parties feeling insecure and resentful, especially Azerbaijan due to the de facto loss of territory. It is unlikely that simply shifting the balance of power will lead to a better outcome, as Armenia will feel traumatized by its loss and perceive itself as victimized.

The International Crisis Group recommends a new arrangement that includes Armenia, but this cannot be achieved quickly and will require an agreement on the status of Nagorno-

Karabakh. Attempting to address this complex problem at this time could be risky, so a gradual strategy that focuses on addressing humanitarian needs and establishing connections to integrate the area over time may be a more appropriate approach for foreign players and warring parties. As these connections develop, the future of Nagorno-Karabakh may become clearer.

To maintain peace in the region, it is important to prevent it from being manipulated for other countries' geopolitical interests. Some Western countries are displeased with Moscow's influence and Ankara's backing of Azerbaijan, which may give them a lasting role in any potential resolution. According to a U.S. ambassador, approving a Russia-Turkey agreement would establish a precedent that Western nations may not want to set. A European ambassador told the International Crisis Group that Paris is concerned about the possibility of a Russian-Turkish alliance resulting from recent events in the region.³¹

Conclusion

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War has displaced around 91,000 refugees and is an underreported humanitarian crisis. Literature suggests that while refugees initially gained aid and support during the start of the conflict, many of those resources dried up while the conflict continued to displace more and more civilians from Nagorno-Karabakh. Interviewee data further confirms that the primary trends among the refugees include, but are not limited to, insecurity through total displacement, lack of opportunities for rehabilitation, lack of continued aid, impossibility of repatriation, effects of the Lachin Corridor blockade, as well as the overall subjective experience and reaction to the refugee crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh. More research can be conducted on the long-term aid packages that would alleviate the prolonged refugee crisis, how the current situation can be used as a bargaining tool in peace talks, how the refugee experience might be subjectively improved, and how policies can be reprioritized in areas of

conflict to ensure that refugees still get the care and support they need to acclimate to their situation. This study has uncovered many trends that other researchers can use to also develop other future research questions that can help refugee populations all over the world.

ENDNOTES

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30. «Վարձակալության աջակցության նվազման պատճառով մենք չենք կարող շարունակել բնակարան վարձել Երևանում: Ուստի, թեև վախենում էինք Արցախում

տիրող անկայուն վիճակից, այլ տարբերակ չունենիք, քան վերադառնալու մեր տունը, որը բարեբախտաբար դեռ կանգուն էր»:

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