

Highlights

- Fiercest clashes since 2016 in and around Nagorno-Karabakh are expected to lead to displacement, as confirmed by initial observations. No data is publicly available on the number of displaced persons as a result of the current conflict, with news reports claiming that up to half the population of Nagorno-Karabakh has been displaced.¹
- IOM stands ready to support with humanitarian assistance to displaced and other conflict-affected populations in the fields where it has experience and capacity to respond, in coordination with governmental, international and local actors.
- IOM Armenia maintains its capacity to address the myriad impacts of crises, including in preparedness, livelihoods and health.



Participants engage in an inter-agency simulation exercise on humanitarian relief and preparedness in Armenia @IOM Armenia.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

On the morning of 27 September, renewed hostilities erupted in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. This is the latest flare up in a conflict that has been ongoing for over thirty years. In the early 1990s, the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh led to the displacement of 492, 000 individuals, including 420,000 refugees (360,000 out of whom fled from Azerbaijan) as well as 72,000 internally displaced persons. Since 1994, a truce has been agreed between the parties – nevertheless, there have been outbursts of violence, including fierce clashes in 2016 and a previous flare up in July 2020.

The current situation is occurring within a broader context of vulnerability and displacement. Since the beginning of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, about 25,000 persons have been displaced and sought protection in Armenia, making the country the third largest recipient per capita of Syrian refugees in Europe. This is a considerable number for a country of just 3 million and represents yet another challenge for Armenia.

Additionally, as a result of the massive explosion that occurred in August in the city of Beirut port in Lebanon, over 2,000 Armenians arrived in Armenia in an attempt to start a new life in the country. As per reports from local organizations, up to 10,000 Armenians (mainly women, children and elderly) began arriving in a number of local communities as a result of the current hostilities. According to the latest reports, those spontaneously arriving populations remain in need of shelter, basic food and hygiene items.

At the same time, the Armenian economy is expected to contract significantly as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a rise in the unemployment rate, reduced remittances and increase of poverty. Almost 250,000 persons in Armenia rely on mobility-generated income, including common livelihoods strategies such as remittances sent by family members working abroad and income from circular or seasonal migration. Importantly, diaspora remittances comprise over 11 per cent of Armenia's gross domestic product (GDP), according to 2019 World Bank figures. Furthermore, data from the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia confirms that 98 per cent of received remittances are spent on routine consumption expenses. However, this income has been severely diminished or interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, crisis-affected people living in Armenia are predominantly engaged in low-income jobs without proper labour contracts, living in rented housing without formal rental contracts, and do not have family/community support and thus are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 outbreak in Armenia.

The UN therefore remains concerned at the consequences of the ongoing armed conflict on civilian lives, as it increases population displacement from the conflict area, as well as interrupts critical services and livelihoods. IOM therefore joins the call of the UN Secretary General for both sides to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, by ensuring the protection of the civilian population and by preventing damage to essential civilian infrastructure.

¹Reported by AFP on 7 October 2020.

CONTACTS

IOM CAPACITY

The IOM office in Yerevan was opened in 1993 and currently has 15 staff and seven experts/specialists in various fields. IOM's objectives in the country include assisting the State of Armenia in achieving enhanced migration policy development and implementation, improved border management practices, enhance protection of migrant rights as well as enhancing the capacity of national NGOs to address migration issues, revitalizing and developing rural communities, and enhancing the self-sufficiency and (re) integration of returnees, victims of trafficking, refugees, and low income and vulnerable persons.

GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

As an active member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as well as an integral part of the United Nations family globally, IOM is able to offer rapid scale-up of its response to the mobility dimensions of crisis, dependent on the availability of emergency funding and on the basis of thorough needs assessments. Key sectors that IOM is active in include Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), displacement tracking – for which IOM developed its own methodology, called the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Shelter and Non-Food Items. In addition, IOM has an extensive portfolio of projects that look at providing mid- and longer-term support to States and populations to progress towards solutions for recovery and resilience.

OPERATIONS IN ARMENIA



IOM Armenia's activities in the field of emergency and post-emergency operations, include response to forced migration and massive population movements, including protracted internal and cross-border displacement and refugee situations.

Demonstrating IOM's capacity in emergency preparedness and response, IOM organized a simulation exercise in Armenia in August 2017 with different stakeholders in order to improve their capacities to prepare for and respond to a potential crisis scenario involving mass displacement from various countries in the region into Armenia. Thirty participants from concerned agencies, for example border guards, police, customs, healthcare providers, and so on, gathered at the "Gogavan" border crossing check point and were involved in a real time simulation based on a scenario where 30,000 displaced people would arrive in Armenia, including persons with specific vulnerabilities. IOM's strong experience in this kind of simulation exercise, bringing

together different points of view including the different sectors of emergency response as well as border management allowed it to provide feedback on how to ensure actors can fulfil their humanitarian responsibilities and address any concerns for the safety and security of migrants and the country.



Installing an irrigation system, IOM supports local communities to enhance humanitarian security in Akner Village, Armenia @IOM Armenia.

Since 1997, IOM in Armenia has also been implementing micro-enterprise development activities to increase the economic self-sufficiency of vulnerable people as well as to facilitate integration of refugees and Armenians displaced as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. The IOM Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDP) has contributed to the sustainability of livelihoods for vulnerable local populations and refugees/ displaced Armenians through the delivery of business training, referral and business monitoring, and access to financial resources – i.e. micro-loans. The programme has trained 3,500 persons in micro-business management, and delivered over 10,000 loans, amounting to more than USD 10 million; supported 5,300 direct beneficiaries, including loan recipients; and supported 3,650 businesses (out of which 55% are run by women). Additionally, from 2009 to 2013, IOM led an initiative focused on the socio-economic reintegration and empowerment of mine victims, persons with disabilities and members of their families. The effort supported beneficiaries through improved livelihood opportunities, enhanced employability, and greater access to seed funding for starting/expanding own business.

IOM has also rehabilitated and reutilized traditional underground water systems (Chaheriz) in the south province of Armenia to improve access to drinking water for conflict affected communities.



IOM staff consult with a beneficiary who received a micro-loan after she lost her livelihood due to COVID-19 @IOM Armenia.

IOM Armenia’s current areas of work include:

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM Armenia has been working on multiple fronts to ensure enhanced preparedness for and response to the pandemic on a national level. Actions to date have included the enhancement of data for national surveillance, information sharing and reporting on vulnerable third country migrants; the production and dissemination of fit-for-purpose information, education communication (IEC) materials tailored to the needs of migrants; the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and critical supplies for vulnerable migrants; and the provision of protection and assistance services to vulnerable migrants within the context of COVID-19. IOM has utilized its current networks and capacities to build innovative approaches to emergency response including, for example, the use of diaspora networks to enhance peer-to-peer learning within the Armenian medical community.

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT:

IOM Armenia continues to work with relevant government authorities to strengthen border management capacities and ensure alignment with international best practices, training and educational standards. Recent efforts have included a particular focus on building local capacity on the integration of human rights and gender considerations into policies and practice.

LABOR MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

IOM Armenia has long been engaged in supporting the broader development initiatives of the Armenian government with initiatives ranging from support in monitoring the migration targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to strengthening the effective utilization of the diaspora’s intellectual potential, knowledge and skills to promote economic and social modernization and transformation into a knowledge and innovation based economy. Further, as part of its response to COVID-19, IOM has been working to mitigate the disproportionate socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people and businesses in Armenia through access to adequate, inclusive and effective social and economic protection mechanisms.

IOM ACTIVITIES ARE SUPPORTED BY :



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