



Migration Profile

AZERBAIJAN

A. Executive Summary

Azerbaijan is the most populated and rich republic in the South Caucasus. Its capital, Baku, is the largest city in the country and the biggest port in the entire Caucasus. It is also the world's lowest national capital, standing at 28 metres below sea level.

Oil and natural gas are the country's prime resources. As a matter of fact, Baku has built all of its international relations on the exploitation of its national energy deposits. Energy production has also enabled the country to raise its strategic value before other neighbouring countries interested in purchasing Azerbaijani hydrocarbons.ⁱ In relation to consumer countries in Europe, Azerbaijan's value has increased thanks to its role in the implementation of the European Union Southern Gas Corridor (SGC). The corridor was completed in December 2020 through a pipeline system connecting Baku to the Italian Adriatic coast.

Since 2001, Azerbaijan has been part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and of the Council of Europe. Even though it is not directly a NATO member, it joined the NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme in 1995.ⁱⁱ The country has thus cooperated with NATO, specifically in its Kosovo and Afghanistan missions. Until July 2021, Azerbaijani troops were still active as part of the *Resolute Support mission* in Afghanistan.

Since 1993, the country has been ruled by a single family that has been in power for nearly three decades. The President of the Republic, according to the Constitution, selects the provincial executive committees and members of the judiciary, in addition to being in charge of the executive branch. The Constitution centralises thus significant powers in the office of the President of the Republic.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, in June 2020 Azerbaijan introduced a lockdown and has currently adopted a special quarantine regime that will remain in effect until March 1, 2022. As one of the wealthiest countries of the Caucasian region, in 2020 Azerbaijan donated 5 million US dollars to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Azerbaijan the international migrant stock at mid-year 2020 counted 252,228 people^{iv}, representing around 2.5% of the entire population. By the end of December 2020, there were 735,000 internal displaced persons (IDPs)^v, 48 asylum seekers and 1,572 refugees under the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees'(UNHCR) mandate.^{vi} The country also includes a number of climate displaced people (67,865 precisely between 2009 and 2014), due to landslides, water shortage, earthquakes and other natural phenomena.^{vii} Concerning human trafficking, the Azerbaijani government does not fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards^{viii}. Nevertheless, it does seem to be making efforts to do so. In 2020, the government officially identified a little less than 100 victims of human trafficking (exactly 94).^{ix}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Caucasus region, where Azerbaijan (officially the Republic of Azerbaijan) is located, is an extremely active place from a geological and environmental viewpoint. It experiences the intensity and frequency of storms, floods, landslides, mudflows and seisms, the latter mostly occurring in the Southern part of the region.^x At the same time, the country is becoming more vulnerable to slow-onset processes such as water shortage, pollution, salinization, heat, sea-level fluctuation, droughts, and soil erosion as a result of climate change.

Azerbaijan has more than 10 million inhabitants. The majority of the population is Azerbaijani (more than 90%), while the largest ethnic minority are the Lezgins (around 2%), followed by Armenians, Russians, and Talysh^{xi}. Almost the whole population is Muslim, about 80% Shia, but there are also Christian Orthodox, Gregorian and Jewish minorities.^{xii} The size of the Azerbaijani diaspora in the world is significant. There are large groups in Russia (over 2 million), Turkey (about 1 million), North America (400,000) and Europe (300,000), in addition to others in northern Iran, estimated to be between 15 and 20 million people.^{xiii} Azerbaijani is the official language.^{xiv} There are, however, a handful of minority languages due to the numerous minorities already mentioned above, such as Russian or Lezgian.

The war with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory is one of Azerbaijan's most critical problems. Nagorno-Karabakh is within the territory of Azerbaijan, but most of the residents are originally from Armenia. In Autumn 2020 a military war broke out in order to control the area; however, already in November 2020 Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives met and signed a ceasefire thanks also to the Russian mediation; but despite this achievement, tensions still persist. The 2021–2022 Armenia–Azerbaijan border crisis still continues, reporting periodical casualties on both sides.

II. International and Internal Migrants

In 2020, there were around 1,700 new immigrants and 600 emigrants according to the State Migration Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.^{xv} In the middle of 2020, the international migrant stock in Azerbaijan included 252,228 people^{xvi}, representing around 2.5% of the total population, and, according to UN data, 131,221 of them were female (52%). Most migrants were aged 75 and over (precisely 23,859 persons); the second largest group was between 40 and 44 years old (23,514 persons), while a minority were children aged 0-4 (7,530 persons)^{xvii}.

People arriving in Azerbaijan come from different countries. In 2020, 39.7% were permanent resident coming from Georgia^{xviii}, 26.8% from Russia, 6.7% from Turkey, 5.3% from Iran, 3.9% from Turkmenistan, 3.8% from Ukraine, 3.7% from Kazakhstan, 3.4% from Uzbekistan, and 6.7% came from other foreign countries.

Internal migration in Azerbaijan has been dominated by flows of people migrating from rural areas to the capital Baku and the Absheron peninsula as well as by internally displaced people forced to flee because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Such urbanisation is leading to overcrowding in the urban areas, especially in the capital, and to consequent lack of employment opportunities for everyone and increasing poverty rates.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to UN Migrant Stocks, at mid-year 2020 Azerbaijan had an emigration rate of 10.6% of its entire population^{xix}. In 2020, 52.1% emigrated to the Russian Federation for permanent residence^{xx}, 21.8% went to Kazakhstan, 6.3% to Turkey, 3.3% to Ukraine, 2.6% to Belarus, 2.1% to Georgia, and 10.2% emigrated to other foreign countries. The United States also seems to be an important destination for Azerbaijanis.^{xxi}

The EU-27 area is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for migrants coming from Azerbaijan. In 2018, the Azerbaijani migration went to the Europe Union, mostly for family reasons (26%), educational purposes (13%) and work reasons (9%). The remaining 34% were there for other reasons, like for instance international protection.^{xxii} In 2020, their main destination within the EU was Germany^{xxiii}, while outside the EU - but still in the European region - the UK was among the most inviting countries,^{xxiv} where, according to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), mainly students relocated.^{xxv}

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

According to IDMC, as of December 31, 2020 the total number of IDPs was 735,000,^{xxvi} and IDPs of concern to UNHCR were 653,921^{xxvii}.

According to UNHCR, in 2020 there were 48 asylum seekers^{xxviii} and 1,572 refugees under the UNHCR mandate that same year,^{xxix} but overall there was an 87% decrease in applications for refugee status in 2020 compared to 2019, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the end of 2020, according to UNHCR most refugees came from Afghanistan (1,087) and also from Russia (350). 43 refugees came from Iran,^{xxx} while 24 asylum seekers came from Afghanistan, and another 24 from the Russian Federation.

IDPs are mostly located in Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Mingechaur and other large urban cities, rather than rural areas.^{xxxi} The majority of IDPs live in “collective centres (public buildings, dormitories) and temporary shelters”;^{xxxii} over there, living conditions are harsh and services like clean water, appropriate sanitation or electricity are scarcer than among non-IDPs.^{xxxiii} Some of the main problems IDPs face are poor living conditions and very low incomes. IDPs

experience “high levels of anxiety, psycho-social distress, poor health and marginalisation, and feelings of exclusion”^{xxxiv}. Young people who grow up in an IDP society face a lack of opportunity and seem to have fewer options for their future.

Concerning the climate displaced people, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), between 2009 and 2014 natural disasters affected 67,865 people.^{xxxv} On January 27, 2018 the danger of landslides in Baku brought forth another 390 IDPs^{xxxvi}, and on February 5, 2019 an earthquake in Shamake produced another 140 IDPs.^{xxxvii} The increasing exacerbation of environmental degradation seems to have relevant impacts on the living quality of some communities, specifically those located in certain areas of the country, more affected by natural disasters.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In 2020, the government of Azerbaijan officially identified 94 victims.^{xxxviii} Among them, 90 were female (96%) and 4 were male, but among all of them only two were children. Most female victims were sexually exploited (85), and the other 5 were forced in labour, while the 4 males were also labour victims.^{xxxix}

Some victims are exploited in Azerbaijan (they are either from Azerbaijan or foreign origin), and some others are Azerbaijani victims exploited abroad. Over the past 5 years, it was reported that traffickers exploited Azerbaijani men in forced labour, both inside and outside Azerbaijan, in countries like the Russian Federation, Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Women and children are exploited in sex rinks, both in or out of the country, mostly in Pakistan, the UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, and in the Russian Federation.^{xl} Azerbaijan is also considered a destination country for both labour and sex trafficking for victims arriving from Russia, Turkmenistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine. In Azerbaijan children are exploited in forced labour fulfilling tasks like “roadside vendors and at tea houses and wedding facilities”^{xli}. In 2020, there were no reported cases for these activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic measures.

There are different routes for human trafficking, from the Baku airport to several other cities. Traffickers use the city of Shiraz (Iran) “as a transit point to bring ethnic Azeri girls from Azerbaijan to the UAE and exploit them in sex trafficking rings”.^{xlii} Azerbaijan has been used recently as a transit territory for sex and labour victims coming from Iran, Turkey, Central Asia and the UAE.

Victims of human trafficking have some kind of access to several facilities. The government provides legal, psychological, medical and employment assistance^{xliii} to officially recognised or potential victims through the Victim Assistance Centers (VAC), not only in the capital but also in other cities. In 2020, the government through VAC helped twelve officially recognised victims to find employment,^{xliv} and a “Children Hotline” provided assistance to a few thousand children (6,657 precisely, according to OHCHR).^{xlv} Some of these calls were health related; others were asking for psychological support resulting from domestic violence; others were in need of legal assistance or educational help. The Minister of Internal Affairs helped set up a “shelter for trafficking victims”^{xlvi}, and provided accommodations and financial aid, in

addition to legal assistance.

VI. National Legal Framework

Azerbaijan is on the “Tier 2 Watch list”, meaning that the government “does not fully comply”^{xlvii} with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)’s minimum standard. Nevertheless, it is making efforts to do so and has adopted several acts.

In June 2005 the Law on Fight against Human Trafficking was adopted. Article 9 states that Azerbaijan's body of competent executive power should include courses on prophylactics and prevention of human trafficking in educational institutions curricula. It should also include educational programs for the formation of experts in the field of combating human trafficking,^{xlviii} in order to set up a system of social and educational measures to eradicate circumstances and conditions conducive to child homelessness^{xlix}.

Sex and labour trafficking are deemed illegal by the Criminal code of the Azerbaijan Republic, with penalties ranging from “five to ten years”¹ in jail for adult victims and eight to twelve years in prison for minor victims. In 2013 Azerbaijan also approved a Migration Code, the “Migration Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan”. Article 79 - concerning the “decision of expulsion” - mentions human trafficking. It claims that children who have been victims of human trafficking are not eligible for expulsion.^{li}

In 2007 a Decree of the Azerbaijan President established the State Migration Service.^{lii} It is a law enforcement agency with the status of a central executive body, implementing the state policy regarding migration.

Azerbaijan signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the related 1967 Protocol. It signed the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954) and ratified the UN Convention on Combating Transnational Organised Crime in 2003 and its complementing Protocol on Prevention, Elimination and Prosecution of Trafficking in Human Beings, especially that of women and children. This protocol states its goals in article 2, explaining that it prevents and fights human trafficking with a focus on women and children. It protects (Art. 2, lett. b) and helps the victims while respecting their human rights, and fosters cooperation within States Parties in order to achieve these goals (Art. 2, lett. c). The protocol also provides a specific definition of “Trafficking in persons”.^{liii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of Internal Affairs' Main Department for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings is responsible for identifying and protecting human trafficking victims, as well as conducting investigations and prosecuting trafficking offences. Simultaneously, 32 state bodies, “local executive authorities, specialised non-governmental organisations, higher education institutions, and commissions for juvenile affairs and protection of rights”^{liv} have been engaged in activities to prevent and eradicate all forms of human trafficking, including trafficking of children, in accordance with the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in

Human Beings in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2020-2024).^{lv}

The Minister of Internal Affairs is thus active, not only to provide accommodation for trafficking victims and financial assistance, but also to maintain an Anti-Trafficking Department which investigated most trafficking cases in the last years.^{lvi} The government also provides “robust victim assistance”^{lvii} thanks to the above-mentioned VACs and to the adoption of the 2020-2024 National Action Plan on Combating trafficking in human beings, supported by IOM.

International organisations

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) monitors the situation in the communities along the Armenian border.^{lviii}

UNHCR operating in Azerbaijan monitors asylum applications and seeks to improve the quality of the government's asylum procedure, by giving information and training on international protection standards.^{lix} UNHCR also provides legal advice and representation to applicants seeking international protection. Refugees who are recognized by UNHCR, but not by the government, can be protected from refoulement but still do not have official legal status.^{lx}

The Catholic Church

In Azerbaijan there is only the *sui iuris* Apostolic Prefecture of Azerbaijan, directly subordinate to the Holy See, that is located in Baku and covers the national territory. The Church of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception was built in 2006, and mostly offers liturgical celebrations.

Caritas also operates in Azerbaijan, working together with the Sisters of Charity (Mother Teresa's religious order) who have settled in Baku since 2005. The Sisters' house welcomes those who lack access to food or parental home, or those who have a very low income.^{lxi} Concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Caritas Armenia is particularly active; it initiated a 12-month program in March 2021 to provide housing and livelihood aid to 3,000 people (600 conflict-affected households).^{lxii} The project consists of three major operations: minor repairs to substandard shelters, providing displaced families with agricultural equipment to allow them to resume their livelihoods, and distributing emergency assistance to these families, such as health services.

The Salesian Sisters (FMA, *Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*) also operate in Azerbaijan. They are active in parish pastoral ministries, catechesis, the oratory, various youth-oriented free time activities, volunteer work and long-distance adoptions. The FMA Community of St. Teresa of Avila in Baku has also cooperated with the Missionaries of Charity, especially caring for the ill and elderly during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.^{lxiii}

The Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) are also present in Baku. In Azerbaijan, “Salesians are the head of the Mission of the Roman Catholic Church”^{lxiv} and have seven missionaries. Thanks to their work, Baku is provided today with a Catholic parish, a Maryam School, a charity

canteen and relief funds for the poor. Several courses are offered to those who want to be baptised. In the future, “the Salesians are planning to open a home for youths, like the oratories that St. John Bosco founded worldwide”.

The Maryam School is a centre that operates in Azerbaijan since 2004. It is involved in the European Youth Portal to find volunteers^{lxv} and is handled by Slovakian Salesians, whose aim is to provide tutoring for students in primary and secondary schools. The centre also offers various courses focused on the development of individual skills and requalification courses for unemployed youth. The Maryam centre provides even tutoring on many subjects of the obligatory education, such as “Azerbaijani language and literature, history, physics, chemistry, mathematics, foreign languages [...] training apprenticeship [...] and various computer classes”^{lxvi}. Finally, this centre holds short-term courses, aimed at increasing the candidate’s chances in the labour market, and offers a “wide selection of sports and free-time activities for children”.^{lxvii}

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