

# The Voice of the People II: Addressing the Needs of Conflict-Affected Societies in Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Efforts

Insights from Displaced Individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh

Scoping study by Peace Dialogue NGO



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## Abbreviations

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CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative/Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation
CR	Conciliation Resources
CSDP	European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUMA	European Union Mission Armenia
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia
FSS	Federal Security Service
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
U.S.	United States



## Executive Summary

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The protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh continues to reshape the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus, causing widespread upheaval and profound human suffering. This study, led by Peace Dialogue NGO and supported by the European Union, is essential for understanding the comprehensive impact of this conflict on those displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh during the mass exodus in September 2023. This document represents the second installment in a series; the initial report, published in February 2024, focused solely on the impacts of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict on society in the Republic of Armenia.

This research employs Johan Galtung's Typology of Basic Human Needs combined with the "Position/Interests/Needs" (PIN) framework to guide its methodology. It features 106 structured interviews with displaced individuals now residing in Armenia, offering an in-depth examination of their needs and concerns in four critical areas: Security, Welfare, Freedom, and Identity. The analysis was conducted using the 'Inclus' digital platform, developed by former affiliates of the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), which provides detailed insights into the complex interplay of factors affecting these communities.

The study highlights several key correlations, dilemmas, and contradictions in the perceptions of threats to peace among respondents. The primary difference between those planning to stay in Armenia or who are undecided and those intending to return to Nagorno-Karabakh lies in the intensity and focus of their concerns. 'Potential returnees' exhibit significantly higher levels of concern across all categories, particularly regarding identity, democratic governance, and cultural preservation. In contrast, those staying in Armenia show more balanced but still substantial concerns, emphasizing general security and living standards. Addressing these complex concerns requires nuanced, context-specific interventions that prioritize both immediate security needs and long-term peace-building goals.

In its conclusion, the study outlines recommendations designed to offer a comprehensive and realistic approach to addressing the complex needs of forcibly displaced individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh who have found refuge in Armenia, with a long-term view of fostering the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process.

## Introduction: Background and Context

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### **The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Complex Tapestry of Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations**

Nagorno-Karabakh, a region in the South Caucasus, has been the epicenter of a prolonged conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This dispute, rooted in historical and cultural complexities, predates the Soviet Union's dissolution, with tensions brewing for decades. The First Karabakh War (1988-1994), triggered by the Soviet collapse, intensified these ethnic and territorial disputes. A significant escalation occurred in 1992-94 when Armenian forces seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjoining Azerbaijani territories. The war resulted in around 30,000 deaths and displaced over a million people, including Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and Armenians from Azerbaijan.

### **The Second Karabakh War and Its Aftermath**

In 2020, the Second Karabakh War, also widely known as the 44-Day War, marked a pivotal chapter in this enduring conflict. Azerbaijan's strategic military campaign, employing advanced warfare technologies, significantly altered the control dynamics over the disputed area. The war resulted in over 6,500 casualties, underscoring the conflict's severity. A landmark moment in the conflict's history was the signing of a trilateral ceasefire agreement on November 10, 2020, mediated by Russian President Vladimir Putin. This agreement, titled 'On a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and the cessation of all hostilities,' enabled Russia to deploy 1,960 peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, a vital link to Armenia. This deployment thereby reinforced Russia's influential role in the conflict's resolution process.

### **Escalations and Humanitarian Crisis**

A significant escalation occurred on September 13<sup>th</sup> 2022, when Azerbaijan launched a large-scale assault on Armenian territories<sup>i</sup>, targeting up to 23 locations in the southern provinces of Syunik, Gegharkunik, and Vayots Dzor. This offensive damaged military and civilian areas in cities like Goris and Kapan, as well as villages such as Sotk, Artanish, Jermuk, and Kut. These hostilities, the most severe since 2020<sup>ii</sup>, ceased temporarily on September 14<sup>th</sup> following a ceasefire. However, the peace was fragile, and further clashes were reported by month's end.

In December 2022, the conflict took another turn when Azerbaijani civilians<sup>iii</sup>, claiming to be environmental activists, set up blockades along the Lachin corridor. This action significantly exacerbated the humanitarian situation, restricting vital access for people and goods. The crisis deepened in April 2023 with a full blockade of the Nagorno-Karabakh, when Azerbaijan established a checkpoint along this key route. The blockade led to international concern. In September 2023, a new phase began when Azerbaijan commenced "anti-terrorist activities" in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, citing the objective to restore constitutional order and alleging the presence of Armenian military forces. This move triggered a massive exodus of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. Over 100,000 residents fled to Armenia, unwilling to live under Azerbaijani control, as reported by departing authorities in Stepanakert. Consequently, the Nagorno-Karabakh breakaway government announced the dissolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

Adding complexity to the already tense situation, Azerbaijani authorities reportedly detained three former presidents of Nagorno-Karabakh and the speaker of its local legislature. These detentions, along with the ongoing imprisonment of individuals from the 44-Day War and subsequent conflicts, have continued to strain relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The persistent detentions underscore the intricate nature of the conflict

and the enduring challenges in achieving a resolution to this prolonged dispute between the two nations.

### **Changing Dynamics and Shifting Alliances**

Since 2020, Armenia has notably shifted its foreign policy, increasingly aligning with Western alliances. This strategic move away from its traditional reliance on Russia has been influenced by both global and regional events, notably Russia's engagement in Ukraine and ongoing tensions in the Middle East. Armenia has been actively seeking partnerships with countries outside the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to modernize its weaponry and enhance its security framework. This shift includes efforts to procure defense equipment from nations like India and France and engage in security collaborations with Greece and Cyprus. Additionally, countries such as the Netherlands, Italy, and Sweden have expressed interest in defense cooperation with Armenia. In a bid to expand its international support network, Armenia is negotiating with the European Union to receive assistance through the European Peace Facility. Concurrently, discussions with the United States are underway, focusing on evaluating the security environment, advancing defense reforms, and strengthening defense cooperation. Similar dialogues are also progressing with France, underscoring Armenia's commitment to diversifying its security alliances and capabilities.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is making efforts to have balanced relations with Moscow. Although Azerbaijan has announced that Russian deployment in Karabakh is allowed only until 2025, following the expected departure of Armenians from the area, there is no apparent rush to expedite the withdrawal of Russian forces. Presently, both Russia and Azerbaijan are pressing Armenia to provide a corridor from the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan to the main country, to be controlled by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSS).

A significant indicator of Armenia's evolving security priorities is the deployment of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy's (CSDP) civilian mission (EUMA) in the region. This mission conducts daily patrols along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, marking a new level of international involvement and support. In 2023, the mission increased the number of its deployed personnel. Both Russia and Azerbaijan have expressed displeasure with the EUMA deployment in Armenia. However, Azerbaijan received a similar proposal from the EU to deploy the mission on its side, especially as the mission's longer-term goal is to foster confidence-building between the conflict-divided populations of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

### **Stalled Peace Negotiations**

The Nagorno-Karabakh peace negotiations, historically overseen by the OSCE Minsk Group, have encountered notable challenges, particularly during the 44-Day War. The group faced difficulties in effectively preventing the conflict from escalating. In this complex scenario, Russia has played a significant role, often diverging from the Minsk Group's approach. Consequently, two main paths for negotiation have emerged: one led by Russia and the other facilitated by the European Union (EU), with support from the U.S. It is crucial to recognize that the functionality of the Minsk Group was halted following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading to a more fragmented mediation landscape. Recent progress in the talks has been limited, particularly in the wake of Azerbaijan's military advancements. This pivotal change necessitated a reevaluation of traditional mediation mechanisms and approaches in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, further complicating the quest for a sustainable peace agreement.

Bringing Armenia and Azerbaijan to the negotiating table has been challenging. Armenia seems to prefer mediation from Western countries, while Azerbaijan is more inclined

towards working with regional powers like Russia and Turkey. A key meeting planned for October 2023 between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was cancelled because President Aliyev had issues with France's role and Turkey's exclusion from the talks. Despite this, Prime Minister Pashinyan met with European leaders, leading to a joint statement that emphasized the need for normalized relations and a commitment to non-violence.

In an encouraging development in December 2023, Armenia and Azerbaijan issued a joint statement independently, a first in this peace process without any external mediator's involvement. In the statement, they expressed a belief that there was a unique opportunity to achieve lasting peace in the region. Both parties also agreed to work towards normalizing relations and reaching a peace treaty, respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They announced a prisoner exchange, trading 32 detained Armenian soldiers for 2 Azerbaijani soldiers, which was quickly implemented. This move was welcomed by the EU and the U.S., who have long encouraged a peace treaty to address unresolved issues, including border demarcation.

However, as 2023 ended, official negotiations under the EU, US, or Russia-led tracks had yet to restart. This highlights the ongoing complexity of the situation and the continued efforts needed to resolve the long-standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

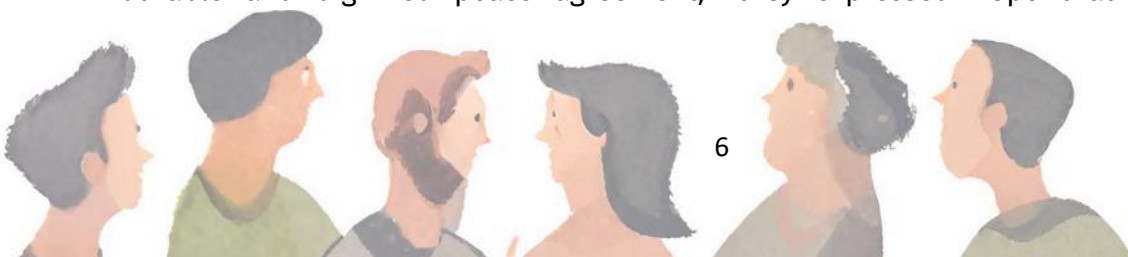
### **Contested Scope of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Negotiations**

Securing a long-term peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is complex, largely due to their differing interpretations of the conflict's subject, nature and progression. Baku insists that the Karabakh conflict has ended and calls for resolving any residual issues through negotiations. In contrast, Yerevan is concerned about possible new escalations from Azerbaijan, especially regarding the creation of a land corridor to Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave.

In Armenia, there is strong societal pressure on the government to emphasize the rights of Karabakh Armenians as critical for long-term regional peace. Additionally, Armenian society expects the government to set preconditions for peace negotiations, such as the return of all prisoners and the withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Armenian territories. Official Yerevan maintains that any peace agreement should include a concrete mechanism for border delimitation, suggesting the use of late Soviet-era military maps, reportedly supported by the European Union. However, this proposal is not accepted by Baku. Hikmet Hajiyev, the senior foreign policy advisor to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, has expressed that Azerbaijan prefers to address border delimitation issues separately from the peace treaty discussions. This stance represents a significant point of contention in the negotiations, highlighting the deep-rooted differences between the priorities and stands of two countries.

These divergent views and societal expectations contribute considerable uncertainty to both the substance and effectiveness of a potential peace agreement. Concerns persist about how the agreement would impact the lives of people in the conflict zone and whether it would adequately meet their diverse needs and rights.

In May, 2024, Armenia has returned to Azerbaijan four border villages it seized decades ago, and Armenia and Azerbaijan claim progress in border delimitation talks. The land transfer, strongly condemned by the Armenian opposition, sparked angry protests in Tavush border villages seriously affected by it. Despite the fact that Western partners, including the US and the EU, welcomed the demarcation process as "an important step toward concluding a durable and dignified peace agreement," they expressed hope that this "positive



experience” will be used in the border delimitation and demarcation process, supposedly based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration signed by newly independent ex-Soviet republics.

As of July 2024, however, no remarkable progress has been recorded in that direction. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan state that they are close to signing a peace treaty, which could become a reality in a matter of months. However, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and other leaders have reiterated in recent weeks that the signing of a peace treaty with Armenia, sought by Pashinyan's administration, is conditional on a change to Armenia's constitution. They claim that it contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan. Baku specifically wants Yerevan to remove a constitutional reference to a 1990 declaration of independence, which in turn cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast.

### **A Complex and Fluid Landscape**

In this context, addressing the concerns of conflict-affected populations becomes critically urgent. This situation emphasizes the need for a comprehensive peace deal that effectively addresses key issues such as security, identity, welfare, and freedom, all of which are vital for sustained stability and prosperity in the region. The significant, yet often underreported, civilian casualties and injuries further complicate the situation. Every conflict episode inflicts severe losses on civilian lives, resulting in long-lasting psychological trauma and widespread societal grief. The conflict has also been characterized by numerous human rights violations, including reports of atrocities, the use of banned munitions in civilian areas, and mistreatment of prisoners of war. These violations exacerbate existing tensions and pose significant obstacles to the reconciliation process.

Furthermore, the conflict has led to considerable economic hardship for civilians, resulting in damage to critical infrastructure. This destruction limits access to essential services, disrupts education, and undermines the economic stability of the region. The psychological impact on civilians, especially children who have lived through the conflict, is profound, leading to extensive trauma and mental health issues. Addressing these humanitarian issues is imperative not only for the immediate welfare of those affected but also for the long-term prospects of peace and stability in the region.

Decades of peacemaking experience have shown that lasting peace agreements must address these fundamental issues. Statistics indicate a worrying pattern of peace processes lapsing back into violence due to superficial agreements. This risk and policy challenge is at the heart of this research: the danger of reverting to conflict because of inadequate peace agreements. The ceasefire agreement of November 10, 2020, exemplifies the shortcomings of incomplete peace agreements that neglect to address the deeper societal wounds and grievances.



## Objectives of the Study

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Supported by the EU, Peace Dialogue NGO, in collaboration with Azerbaijani partners, has undertaken a comprehensive, needs-based scoping study titled **"The Voice of the People: Addressing the Needs of Conflict-Affected Societies in Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Efforts."** This study aims to identify and understand the fundamental needs of various groups affected by the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. It delves into the underlying needs and fears that shape societal viewpoints and outlines actionable plans for addressing these issues.

The study also pinpoints specific threats that influence public perceptions of a dignified peace and develops customized recommendations to address these concerns. Recognizing that a potential treaty might not resolve every issue identified, Peace Dialogue is dedicated to promoting a human-centered, needs-based approach to achieve a lasting political resolution of the complex conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**This report presents findings from standardized interviews conducted with individuals displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh who have found refuge in Armenia. It includes perspectives from those displaced during the mass exodus in September 2023.**

The project's success is greatly attributed to the active support of London-based Conciliation Resources (CR) and Helsinki-based Crisis Management Initiative (CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation). The latter has been instrumental in helping Peace Dialogue analyze the collected data.



## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

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This scoping study's methodology was designed with precision to gain a multifaceted understanding of respondents' basic needs in relation to their views on a sustained and dignified peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. **The study includes 106 interviews, conducted by 3 trained interviewers with individuals displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh who have found refuge in various regions of Armenia.**

### Sampling Methodology

This study was methodically designed to explore the distinct needs of populations in various geographical and demographic settings. The purpose of targeting these specific categories was to gain insights into how proximity to conflict zones and different living environments affect the needs and viewpoints of the populations involved. Additionally, the study aimed to capture a diverse range of needs across various demographic groups, including differences in gender, occupation, and age.

In terms of methodology, the study utilized snowball sampling, a non-probability approach suitable for the study's unique focus and resource limits. This method involves initial participants recruiting others from their networks, creating a chain of referrals. While effective for reaching specific groups, this technique may not capture a fully diverse range of perspectives, as it builds a sample based on existing networks. Thus, while insightful, the findings should be extrapolated with caution, as they may not be entirely representative of the broader population.

### Data Collection Techniques

Interviews, lasting 30-40 minutes, were conducted using a standardized questionnaire comprising 21 questions. The rationale for this structured approach is detailed in the theoretical framework section below.

### Analysis Method

Data was analyzed using 'Inclus<sup>iv</sup>' a tool developed from complex peace mediation processes by Nobel Peace Prize laureate President Martti Ahtisaari's Crisis Management Initiative's (CMI) former employees. This tool is designed to identify and analyze shared interests, threats, and uncertainties to aid progress in the peace process.

### Theoretical Framework

Needs-Based Approach: The study adopted Johan Galtung's Typology of Basic Human Needs<sup>v</sup>, categorizing needs into *Security, Welfare, Freedom, and Identity*. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of societal expectations and inherent contradictions in conflict resolution processes, emphasizing the need to align resolution strategies with the underlying conflict sources. Identifying these needs was crucial for making practical, multi-layered recommendations for addressing them.

Identification of Populations' Needs and Fears (PIN Framework): The PIN<sup>vi</sup> (Positions/Interests/Needs) framework was another fundamental theoretical principle of this study, helping to understand the underlying dynamics of the conflict by examining the

perspectives of involved parties. Basic needs form the foundation for societal interests, which in turn influence individual positions. By employing this approach, the study aimed to delve into the underlying emotions, motivations, and needs shaping these positions, thus, in the longer term, aiming at facilitating effective communication and dialogue between conflicting parties. The PIN framework also helped identify common ground and potential areas of compromise, shifting the focus from entrenched positions to shared interests and underlying needs.

The Human Security Concept: This concept formed the third theoretical pillar, identifying fundamental needs within The Human Security Concept: As the third theoretical pillar, the Human Security Concept was integral to identifying fundamental needs within conflict-affected societies. These needs were categorized and subdivided according to the Human Security Concept, providing a deeper understanding of the specific needs that shape participants' positions. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 0-10 the impact of 21 pre-identified threats, categorized into four major groups – threats to security, welfare, freedom, and identity.

### **Limitations of the Study**

- The study is not fully representative, reflecting the views of only those interviewed.
- Subjective perceptions may have influenced respondents' understanding of key terms like security, human rights, democracy, or identity.

Through abovementioned methodology, the study offers vital insights into the complex dynamics of peace and conflict, considering the perspectives of a diverse group of individuals in the region.



## Threats to Peace: Perceptions and Ratings

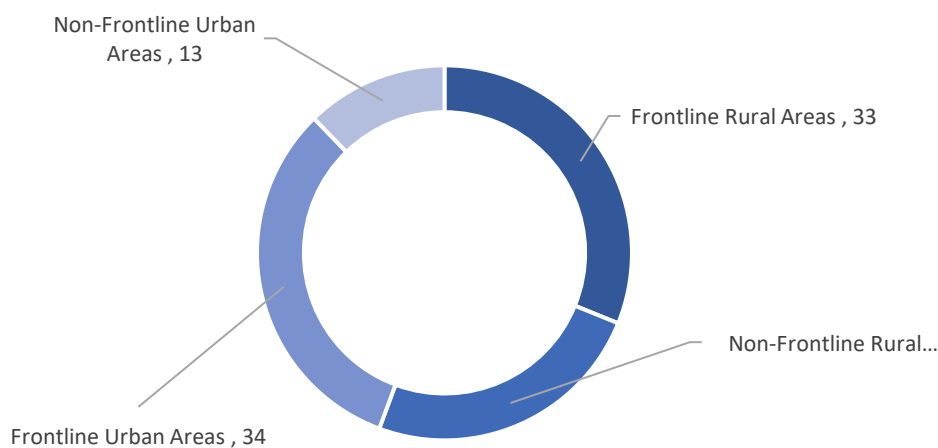
### The Scoping Study Demography

The study included 106 interviews conducted across all regions of Armenia, including the capital, Yerevan. Respondents also mentioned their living areas in Nagorno-Karabakh, with 33 from border-adjacent or frontline rural areas, 34 from border-adjacent urban areas, 26 from non-border rural areas, and 13 from non-border urban areas. The gender distribution comprised 38 males and 68 females.

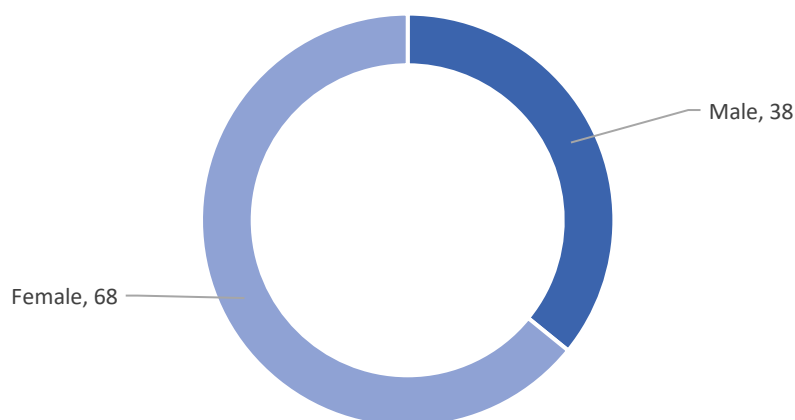
Occupationally, the respondents were diverse: 6 were from state institutions, 5 from local governments, 44 worked in the private or public sector, 30 were unemployed, 6 were students, 9 were retirees, and 6 fell into other categories.

The study covered all age groups, with 40 respondents aged 18-30, 32 aged 30-45, 24 aged 45-60, and 10 aged over 60.

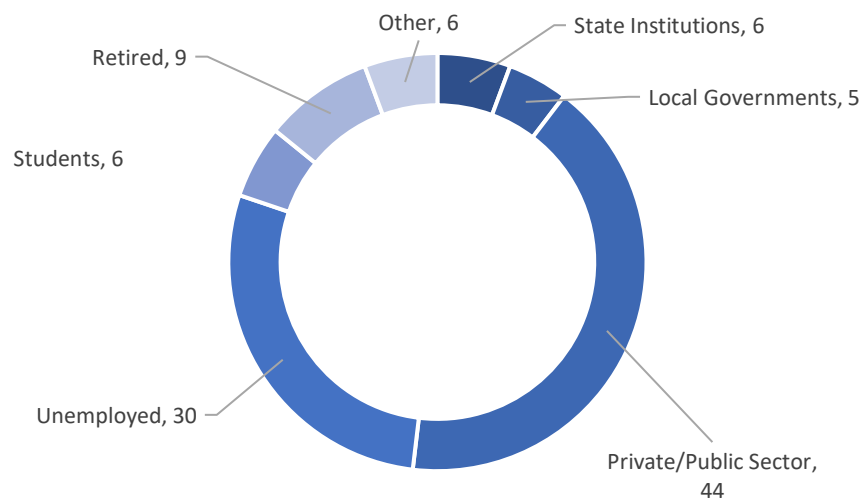
**Fig. 1. Distribution of Interviewees by Former Location in Nagorno-Karabakh**



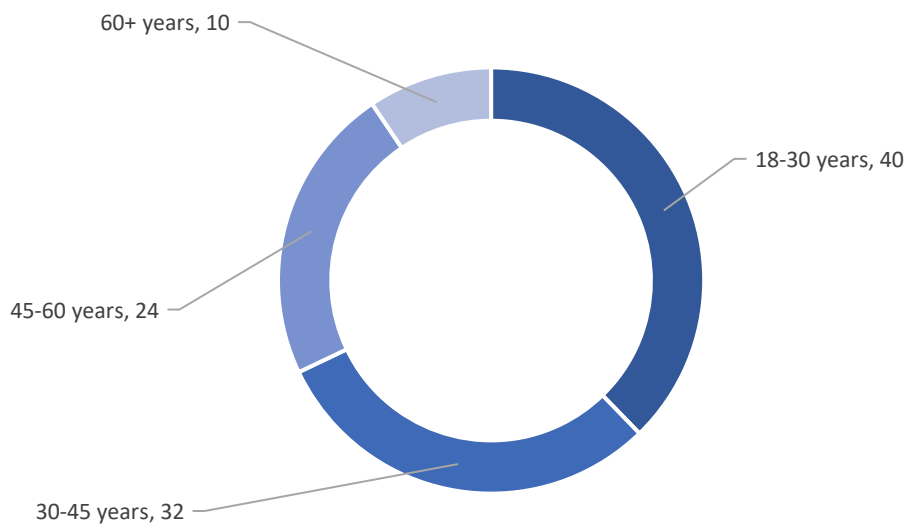
**Fig.2. Gender Distribution**



**Fig.3. Sector Distribution**



**Fig.4. Age Group Distribution**



Respondents were given options for continuing the interview based on their preference: whether they preferred to stay in Armenia or return to their "Home." Among them, 44 expressed their commitment to stay in Armenia, 36 preferred to return "Home," and 26 chose another option. In subsequent calculations and analyses, the needs of the group who decided to stay in Armenia and those who were unsure about their future plans were evaluated jointly, while the data for the group expressing a desire to return to Nagorno-Karabakh were analyzed separately.

They were then asked to evaluate, on a scale from 0 to 10, the impact of various threats on either the development of long-term, dignified peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia (for those who chose to stay in Armenia) or their return to Nagorno-Karabakh (referred to as "Home" in the questionnaire). On this scale, a rating of 1 indicates that the threat is not important at all, while a rating of 10 signifies that it is crucially important. The 21 identified threats were categorized into four major groups: security, welfare, freedom, and identity.



Security Category:

1. Threats to physical existence (acts of violence, warfare, terrorism, or any form of aggression that directly endanger the well-being of individuals or their property).
2. Economic threats (financial instability, poverty, or disruptions to trade and commerce that can have adverse effects on the economic well-being of individuals and societies).
3. Cyber security threats (unauthorized access, hacking, data breaches, identity theft, and other malicious activities that target computer systems, networks, or online platforms, posing risks to digital security and privacy).
4. Environmental threats (risks associated with natural disasters, climate change, pollution, deforestation, and other factors that pose challenges to the health of ecosystems and the sustainable use of natural resources).
5. Political and social threats (challenges to political stability, such as political unrest, corruption, social turmoil, ideological conflicts, and human rights violations that can undermine social cohesion and the well-being of individuals and communities).

Welfare Category:

6. Threats to welfare and financial stability (social exclusion, inequality).
7. Threats to adequate living standards (lack of access to essential services such as housing, food, electricity, gas, water, and other livelihood necessities).
8. Threats to stable employment (limited job opportunities or the inability to secure stable and decent employment, leading to financial stress, reduced access to resources, and decreased overall well-being).
9. Threats to social security (inadequate healthcare, social assistance programs, and pension schemes that fail to provide necessary support to individuals and communities).
10. Threats to potential education and skills development (restricted opportunities for quality education and skill-building, hindering personal growth and socioeconomic advancement).
11. Threats to potential health inequities (inadequate access to clean water, inadequate sanitation, prevalence of infectious diseases or malnutrition).

Freedom Category:

12. Threats to democracy and freedom (suppression of political dissent by governments, restriction of media independence).
13. Threats to effective democratic governance (inadequate or corrupt democratic institutions, lack of transparency and accountability in governance, and limited political participation, which undermine the democratic process and restrict citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in decision-making).
14. Threats to freedom of speech (imposed restrictions on freedom of expression, including censorship, intimidation of journalists, online surveillance and control over media outlets; curtailment of individuals' ability to express their opinions, share information, and participate in public discourse).
15. The human rights violation threats (torture, arbitrary detention, discrimination, and persecution that infringe upon individuals' fundamental human rights, compromising their freedom and hindering their pursuit of personal aspirations).
16. Threats to civil liberties (restrictions on civil liberties, such as the freedom of assembly, association, and peaceful protests, which impede citizens' ability to exercise their rights and voice their concerns).
17. Social and cultural oppression threats (societal norms, traditions, and cultural practices that discriminate against specific groups, including women, minorities, or

marginalized communities, and perpetuate discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion, undermining the principle of equal freedom for all).

### Identity Category:

18. Threats to equality, inclusion and impartiality (discrimination, prejudice, social exclusion, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other aspects of identity, as well as depriving individuals or groups of social, political or economic opportunities because of their identity).
19. Threats to cultural diversity and heritage preservation (cultural assimilation) (imposition of pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms and values, often at the expense of destroying one's own cultural identity and cultural heritage).
20. Identity suppression threats (prohibiting or restricting individuals or groups from expressing their cultural, linguistic or religious identity, which undermines diversity and destroys the richness of cultural heritage).
21. Stereotyping and misrepresentation threats (negative stereotypes and misrepresentation in media, education, or public discourse that perpetuate harmful narratives about certain identities, contributing to discrimination and bias).

### **Key Concerns of the Respondents**

The respondents' perspectives indicate a comprehensive view of peace-building, incorporating security, welfare, freedom, and identity.

Moreover, the calculated average ratings for each category differ between the groups who decided to stay in Armenia, those who were undecided, and those who preferred to return “home”. As mentioned above, in further calculations and analyses, the needs of the group who decided to stay in Armenia and those who were unsure about their future plans were evaluated jointly, while the data for the group expressing a desire to return to Nagorno-Karabakh were analyzed separately.

Thus, the average ratings for the group who decided to stay in Armenia and those who were unsure about their future plans were distributed as follows:

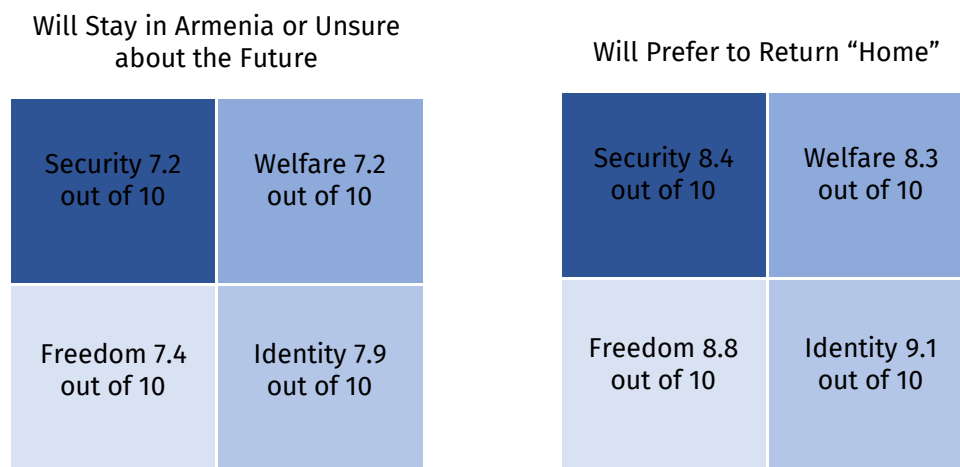
- Security Category: **The average rating is 7.2.**
- Welfare Category: **The average rating is 7.2.**
- Freedom Category: **The average rating is 7.4.**
- Identity Category: **The average rating is 7.9.**

For the group expressing a desire to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, the average ratings were as follows:

- Security Category: **The average rating is 8.4.**
- Welfare Category: **The average rating is 8.3.**
- Freedom Category: **The average rating is 8.8.**
- Identity Category: **The average rating is 9.1.**

The data suggests that the group expressing a desire to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rated all categories higher than those who chose to stay in Armenia or were undecided. These higher average ratings among potential returnees indicate that they perceive greater threats to their security, welfare, freedom, and identity. This highlights their heightened concerns and underscores the need for focused support and interventions tailored to their specific needs.

**Fig. 5. Average Ratings Per Category for the Group Who Decided to Stay in Armenia, Those Who Were Unsure About Their Future Plans, and the Group Expressing a Desire to Return to Nagorno-Karabakh**



It is noteworthy that among all categories, Identity has the highest average rating for both groups, indicating its critical importance to all respondents. Apart from identity-related needs, both groups also prioritize needs related to freedom.

**Based on the average ratings for each category, the prioritization for the group who will stay in Armenia or are unsure about their future is as follows:**

#### **Security Category (Average Rating: 7.2)**

- *Physical threats (8.3)*: The highest-rated subcategory, indicating extreme concern over violence, warfare, and aggression.
- *Political and social threats (7.6)*: Also highly rated, showing significant worry about challenges to political stability and human rights violations that can undermine social cohesion and the well-being of individuals and communities.

#### **Welfare Category (Average Rating: 7.2)**

- *Threats to adequate living standards (7.5)*: Reflecting the lack of access to essential services such as housing, food, electricity, gas, water, and other livelihood necessities.

#### **Freedom Category (Average Rating: 7.4)**

- *Threats to effective democratic governance (7.7)*: This potential threat received the highest concern within the Freedom category, emphasizing threats to effective democratic governance. This includes inadequate or corrupt democratic institutions, lack of transparency and accountability in governance, and limited political participation, all of which undermine the democratic process and restrict citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in decision-making.

#### **Identity Category (Average Rating: 7.9)**

- *Stereotyping and misrepresentation threats (8.2)*: The most prioritized subcategory under Identity, indicating a strong emphasis on negative stereotypes and misrepresentation in media, education, and public discourse.
- *Identity suppression threats (8.0)*: Concerns about the prohibition or restriction of individuals or groups from expressing their cultural, linguistic, or religious identity.



- *Threats to cultural diversity and heritage preservation (8.0)*: Referring to concerns about cultural assimilation.

**The concerns among respondents expressing their willingness to return to Nagorno-Karabakh are as follows:**

**Security Category (Average Rating: 8.4)**: Although highly rated this is the third lowest prioritized category. Within this, the specific concerns are:

- *Physical threats (9.1)*: This indicates extreme concern over violence, warfare, and aggression.
- *Political and social threats (9.1)*: As with the previous group, this was the highest-rated subcategory with the Security category. However, for this group, it primarily reflects mistrust towards the Azerbaijani state and justice system. Respondents mentioned that, in the event of returning to Azerbaijani-governed Nagorno-Karabakh, they would be treated as second-class citizens.

**Welfare Category (Average Rating: 8.3)**

- *Threats to potential education and skills development (8.8)*: The highest-rated subcategory that highlights fears of being unable to receive education in Armenian and being forced to learn in Azerbaijani.
- *Threats to adequate living standards (8.4)*: As with the previous group, it reflects fears related to a lack of access to essential services and basic necessities.

**Freedom Category (Average Rating: 8.8)**

- *Threats to democracy and freedom (9.2)* and to *freedom of speech (9.1)*: These potential threats received the highest concern within the Freedom category, emphasizing worries about the state of democracy in Azerbaijan if the respondents return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

**Identity Category (Average Rating: 9.1)**

- *Identity suppression threats (9.3)*: Concerns about the prohibition or restriction of individuals or groups from expressing their identity.
- *Threats to cultural diversity and heritage preservation (9.3)*: Referring to concerns about cultural assimilation.  
Both are the most prioritized subcategories under the Identity category, indicating a strong concern about being forced to give up the Armenian language and cultural heritage in the event of a return.

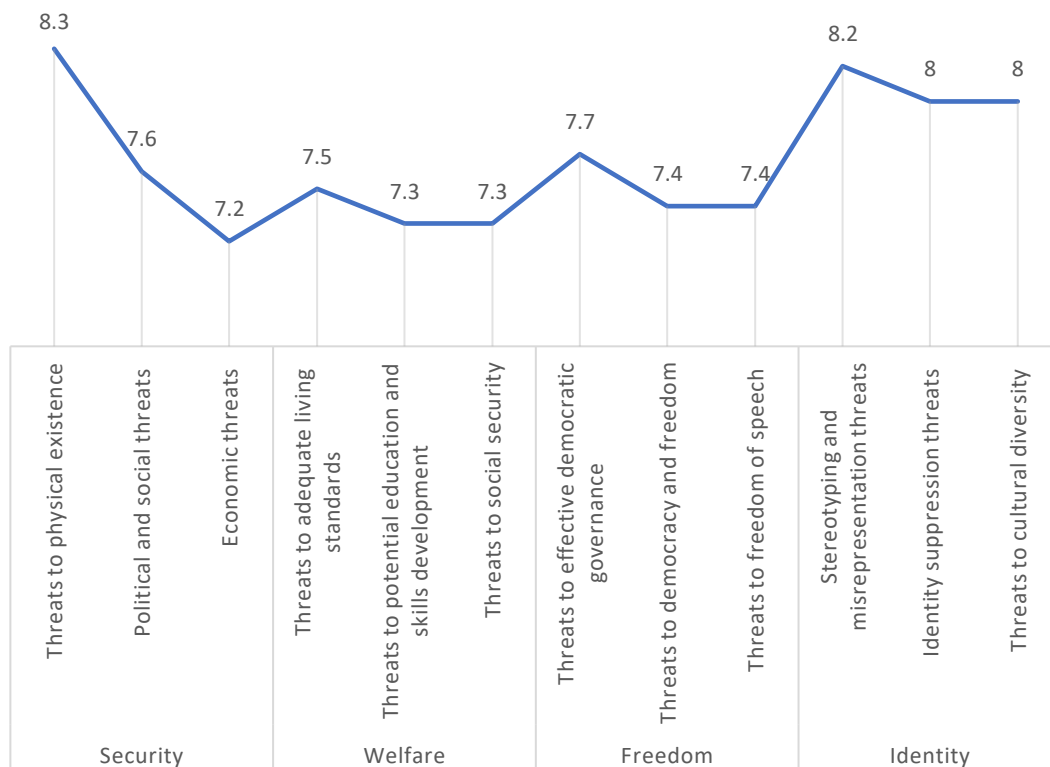
The suggested data indicates that both groups share a comprehensive view of peace-building, with a strong emphasis on identity and freedom. Despite differing levels of concern intensity, the shared priorities highlight common fears about maintaining cultural identity, effective democratic governance, physical safety, and adequate living standards. These commonalities suggest that any intervention aimed at peace-building and support should address these core issues to effectively meet the needs of both groups.

However, the primary difference between the two groups lies in the intensity and focus of their concerns. Potential returnees to Nagorno-Karabakh exhibit a significantly higher level of concern across all categories, especially regarding their identity, democratic governance, and cultural preservation. In contrast, those who choose to stay in Armenia or are undecided show a more balanced but lower level of concern, focusing on general security and living standards.

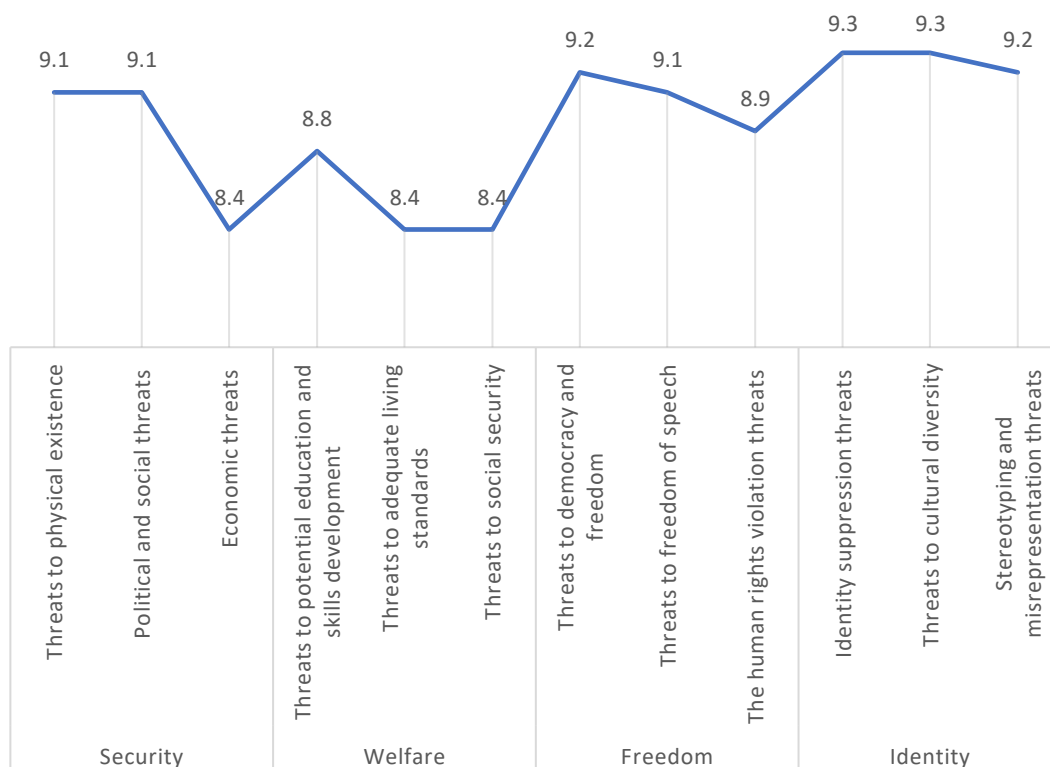


**Fig.6. Top 3 Average Ratings Per Category for Each of the Groups**

Will stay in Armenia or Unsure about the Future



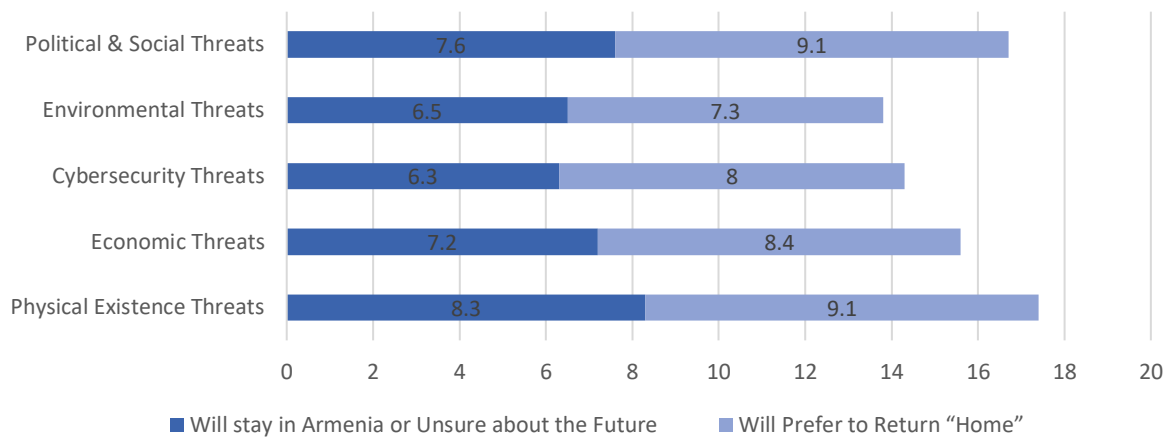
Will Prefer to Return "Home"



## Key Findings and Insights: Correlations and Patterns

### Analysis of Security-Related Threats by Regional, Gender, Age-Related, and Occupational Groups

Fig.7. Average Ratings of Security-Related Threats Category for Each of the Groups



#### 1. Physical Threats:

Overall, the data reveals a clear pattern: those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh consistently exhibit higher levels of concern about physical threats across all regional, gender, age, and occupational groups. This heightened anxiety underscores the perceived dangers and uncertainties associated with returning to Nagorno-Karabakh. The narrative highlights the critical need for targeted interventions and support to address these fears, ensuring the safety and well-being of potential returnees while also considering the concerns of those choosing to stay in Armenia or unsure about their plans.

**Regional Variation:** In frontline rural areas, respondents planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh expressed significantly higher concerns about physical threats, compared to those staying in Armenia. Similarly, in non-frontline rural areas, both groups reported high concerns, but 'potential returnees' rated physical threats slightly higher. In frontline urban areas, the concern is even more pronounced.

*"I envision a future where I can return home, but today it is simply impossible. How can I take my young child and live among Azerbaijanis? It seems absurd right now. Perhaps it will be possible in the future, but I can't say for certain."* (Female, public-sector employee, non-border rural settlement, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)

**Gender Perspective:** Both male and female respondents exhibit increased concern about physical threats if they plan to return to Nagorno-Karabakh. Males planning to "return home" rated physical threats significantly higher than from those staying in Armenia. Females, while also showing higher concern but with a less pronounced disparity compared to males. This indicates a universal concern about physical safety across genders, though males show slightly more anxiety about returning.

*"The situation is very unclear and unstable. In my opinion, the threat to physical existence is significant, regardless of efforts to downplay it."* (Male, public-sector employee, non-border urban settlement, age group 30-45, uncertain about future plans.)

*"I consider the possibility of a war in Armenia to be just as real as it was in Karabakh."* (Female, public-sector employee, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** Young adults (18-30 years old) exhibit the highest levels of concern about physical threats, particularly those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

*"I see the only real possibility of returning home being under the presence of international peacekeeping forces (UN, not Russian peacekeepers). Azerbaijan's armed forces and police should be removed from the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and the entire Lachin corridor should be guarded by UN peacekeepers or EU observers, as is the case with Georgia and Armenia [Referring to EUMM and EUMA]. Today's Nagorno-Karabakh makes it completely impossible for Armenians to return; it presents a direct physical danger to Armenians, making discussions of other threats unnecessary."* (Male, border-adjacent urban settlement, local government employee, age group 18-30, prefers to return home.)

Middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old) planning to return home exhibit notable anxiety with a rating of 9,1, compared to 7,8 for those staying.

*"I know that if I return home, I will definitely be arrested and my life will be in immediate physical danger."* (Male, public-sector employee, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

*"The return of Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh is only possible without an Azerbaijani presence. The Russians should be the guarantors of security there. Ordinary Russian peacekeepers are not to blame for what their government has directed them to do—they have simply followed orders."* (Male, non-border urban settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

*"I really want to go home, but if the Azerbaijanis are there, it is not possible. If there are serious security guarantees, it is possible. But as of today, how can I take my children and go to Karabakh? We have seen the 'guarantees' of the Russians; they just lied to us. There need to be other security guarantees."* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Occupational Variation:** Among state institution employees, an interesting pattern emerges: those planning to stay in Armenia have a higher concern about physical threats (with average rate 8,8) compared to those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh (with average rate 7,0). This could be due to their roles and responsibilities in maintaining security and governance, making them more acutely aware of the threats present.

*"Ethnic intolerance towards Armenians is evident, and in that sense, there are no guarantees of physical security. The presence of a few Armenians in Karabakh doesn't change this reality."* (Female, former government employee, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 30-35, prefers to return home.)

## 2. Economic Threats

The data clearly indicates that economic threats are a significant concern for both those planning to stay in Armenia and those considering a return to Nagorno-Karabakh, with the latter group consistently exhibiting higher levels of worry. This pattern is observed across all regional, gender, age, and occupational groups, though the intensity of concern varies.

**Regional Variation:** Frontline areas, both rural and urban, show higher economic threat ratings, particularly among ‘potential returnees’, reflecting the uncertainties and risks associated with these volatile regions.

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women planning to return exhibit higher concern about economic threats, with men showing a slightly higher level of anxiety.

**Age-Related Concerns:** Younger respondents (18-30 years old) express the highest concern about economic threats, reflecting fears about job prospects and financial stability. Older age groups also show significant concern, especially those planning to return.

*“Currently, the financial situation is unstable, as evidenced by the high levels of emigration. Unfortunately, I believe the financial situation will continue to deteriorate.”* (Female, student, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)

**Occupational Variation:** Former employees of state institutions and local government in Nagorno-Karabakh who plan to return express extreme concern about economic threats, highlighting perceived instability in governance and local economic conditions. Unemployed respondents also exhibit high levels of anxiety, indicating widespread economic fears across different groups.

*“We have lived together before and witnessed many injustices. For example, Azerbaijani villages had gas, but Armenian villages did not.”* (Male, unemployed, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

### 3. Cybersecurity Threats

**Regional Variation:** Frontline areas, both rural and urban, show higher cybersecurity threat ratings.

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women planning to return exhibit higher concern about cybersecurity threats, with men showing slightly higher levels of anxiety.

*“We have already experienced cyber threats during the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh. Such attacks were regularly carried out by Azerbaijanis and continue to happen even now, with more expected in the future.”* (Male, unemployed, non-border urban settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** Younger respondents (18-30 years old) express the highest concern about cybersecurity threats, reflecting fears about digital security and technology reliance.

*“I still remember from Karabakh when my friend's Facebook page was hacked, and misinformation was spread, creating panic and suggesting Armenians were fleeing.”* (Female, student, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)

**Occupational Variation:** Former state institution employees and students planning to return express extreme concern about cybersecurity threats, highlighting perceived instability in digital security and the importance of secure digital access.

### 4. Environmental Threats

**Regional Variation:** Frontline areas, both rural and urban, show higher environmental threat ratings, particularly among ‘potential returnees’, reflecting the uncertainties and risks associated with these regions.



*“I heard that Azerbaijanis are already extracting raw mercury in our village, creating environmental threats.”* (Female, private or public sector employee, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women planning to return exhibit higher concern about environmental threats, with women showing slightly higher levels of anxiety.

**Age-Related Concerns:** Younger respondents (18-30 years old) express the highest concern about environmental threats, reflecting fears about sustainability and long-term impacts.

*“I believe it all begins with the fight for resources.”* (Male, private or public sector employee, non-border urban settlement, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)

**Occupational Variation:** Former state institution employees and students planning to return express significant worry about environmental threats, underscoring perceived instability in environmental conditions and the critical need for sustainable practices.

## 5. Political and Social Threats

**Regional Variation:** Political and social threats are perceived differently across various regions, with significant differences between those planning to stay in Armenia and those considering a return to Nagorno-Karabakh. In border-adjacent rural areas, ‘potential returnees’ rate political and social threats at 9,1, significantly higher than the 8,0 average rating from those staying in Armenia. Border-adjacent urban areas present an even more pronounced difference, with potential returnees rating political and social threats at 9,2, markedly higher than the 6,6 rating from those staying.

*“I believe that Azerbaijan is a corrupt country, and naturally, they will behave the same way in the case of Artsakh.”* (Female, private or public sector employee, non-border urban settlement, age group 18-30, prefers to return home.)

**Gender Perspective:** Male respondents planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rate political and social threats at 9,1, significantly higher than the 7,0 rating from those planning to stay in Armenia. This suggests that men perceive a greater risk of political instability and social discord in the region.

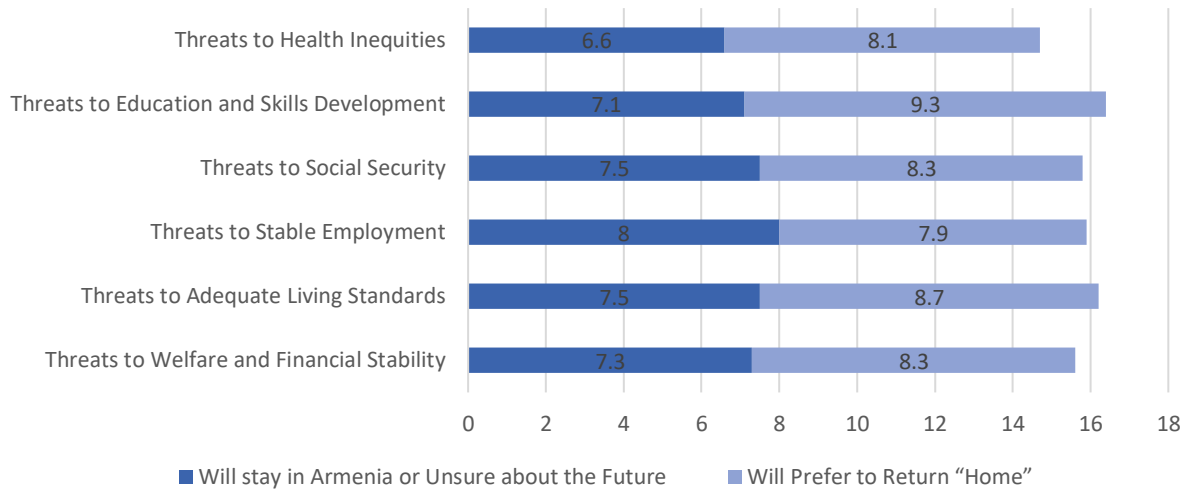
*“There will always be conflicts. It was that way in the past, and it will continue to be so now.”* (Male, unemployed, border-adjacent urban settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** Political and social stability are pressing issues across all age groups, with younger respondents feeling particularly impacted.

**Occupational Variation:** Different occupational groups reflect varying levels of concern about political and social threats. Among former state institution employees, those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rate political and social threats at a maximum of 10,0, compared to 8,0 for those staying in Armenia. This stark disparity underscores fears of governance failures, political manipulation, and social instability for those who previously held governmental roles in Nagorno-Karabakh.

## Analysis of Welfare-Related Threats by Regional, Gender, Age-Related, and Occupational Groups

**Fig.8. Average Ratings of Welfare-Related Threats Category for Each of the Groups**



### 6. Threats to Welfare and Financial Stability

**Regional Variation:** Non-border areas show lesser but still significant concern about financial stability, especially among those who prefers to stay in Armenia.

*"If a person can create wealth, they can do it anywhere. The poor are poor because of their own actions."* (Female, unemployed, non-border urban settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

*"Prosperity is not an obstacle for me. I am willing to live in hunger as long as I can return home to Karabakh."* (Male, non-border urban settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home)

**Gender Perspective:** Gender analysis reveals that both men and women planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh have greater concerns about financial stability compared to those staying in Armenia or who are undecided. Men, in particular, exhibit slightly higher levels of anxiety, reflecting their significant worries about financial security in a new or returning environment. Although women also express substantial concern, their anxiety levels are slightly lower than those of men. However, the overall trend of heightened concern among potential returnees is consistent across both genders.

*"It has always been like that; the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer."* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** The 30-45 age group exhibits consistent concern across both groups, whereas middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old) planning to return show higher levels of worry compared to those remaining in Armenia.

*"Disparity in living standards exists in every country and will continue to exist."* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)



**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant differences in perceptions of welfare-related threats across different occupations.

## 7. Threats to Adequate Living Standards

**Regional Variation:** In rural areas respondents express significantly higher concerns about maintaining adequate living standards compared to those in urban areas in Armenia.

*"I am facing similar difficulties right now. At this moment, it is hard for me to access gas, water, etc." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Women show higher levels of anxiety than men, reflecting significant worries about living conditions and access to essential services.

*"I will face anything just to be in my homeland, Karabakh." (Male, non-border urban settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Age-Related Concerns:** Young adults (18-30 years old) express the highest concern about adequate living standards, especially among those planning to return, reflecting deep anxieties about starting independent lives in an unstable environment.

*"You know that those forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh are facing a housing problem. In general, the social situation of people is very difficult." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, student, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)*

*"We still remember from the Nagorno-Karabakh blockade how the population of Karabakh was left without gas, electricity, and water." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 18-30, prefers to return home)*

*"If all other issues are settled, these services will also be available for everyone." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant differences in perceptions of Adequate Living Standards across different occupations.

## 8. Threats to Stable Employment

**Regional Variation:** In frontline rural areas, those planning to stay in Armenia exhibit moderate concern about stable employment, with an average rating of 8,0.

For those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, the concern is slightly lower at 7,9. This might indicate that stable employment is not a top priority for potential returnees and that they believe employment issues will be resolved once more pressing concerns are addressed.

*"If a person sets a goal for themselves, they can always find a job." (Male, border-adjacent urban settlement, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Women are particularly concerned about the impact of employment issues on the absence of the male workforce, affecting family dynamics and stability.

*"If unemployment persists, it will lead to disorder and instability." (Female, non-border urban settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 18-30, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*



*"It has been a long time since anyone in our family has been able to find a job. It is really very stressful for us. I understand what it is and consider it a serious threat."* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** Retired individuals staying in Armenia show high concern with an average rating of 8,2, reflecting worries about maintaining job stability even in retirement. For those planning to return, the concern drops to 8,0, indicating ongoing concerns about employment prospects in their senior years.

*"Wherever I go, they say I'm old. They only hire young people. What, am I a grandmother?"* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant differences in views on stable employment across various occupational groups.

## 9. Threats to Social Security

**Regional Variation:** In frontline rural areas, those planning to stay in Armenia express moderate concern about social security. However, for those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, the concern intensifies, indicating significant anxiety about the reliability and adequacy of social security systems in that high-risk region.

**Gender Perspective:** No specific gender-related correlations were recorded.

**Age-Related Concerns:** No specific age-related correlations were found. The absence of these correlations might suggest a genuinely uniform concern across these demographics.

**Occupational Variation:** Former employees of state institutions and local governments in Nagorno-Karabakh who are staying in Armenia have a moderate level of concern, with an average rating of 5,8. For those planning to return, the concern drops to 0, possibly reflecting extreme concerns about their roles and the security provided by the Azerbaijani government upon their return.

*"Clearly, there will be no support."* (Male, border-adjacent rural settlement, former local government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

*"Azerbaijanis will do everything to make our lives difficult."* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, former local government employee, age group 18-30, prefers to return home.)

## 10. Threats to Education and Skills Development

**Regional Variation:** No location-related correlations were found. This absence suggests that concerns about education and related threats are uniformly felt across different areas. The pervasive challenges of displacement, access to quality education, and integration may account for this uniformity, regardless of specific geographic location.

**Gender Perspective:** Women show higher levels of anxiety than men, reflecting significant worries about accessing quality educational opportunities. This can be attributed to their traditional roles as primary caregivers and the higher stakes they place on ensuring their children's education. Additionally, women may feel more vulnerable to systemic discrimination and barriers in accessing education.

"My children have already changed four schools after being deported from Karabakh. What kind of normal education are we talking about? This is really a big threat and concern." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

"Let's imagine I take my child to a university where everything must be in Azerbaijani. How can such a thing happen? How will they look at my child? It is clear that there will be discrimination." (Female, non-border urban settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** Young adults (18-30 years old) express the highest concern about education and skills development, especially among those planning to return, reflecting deep anxieties about starting independent lives with adequate educational support.

"Azerbaijan propagates hate speech through education." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, former state institution employee, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)

**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant occupational differences in perceptions of education-related threats across various professions. This lack of variation may suggest that concerns about education are universal across different occupations, indicating a broad recognition of the importance of education and the shared challenges in accessing it, regardless of occupational background.

## 11. Threats to Health Inequities

**Regional Variation:** No location-related correlations were found.

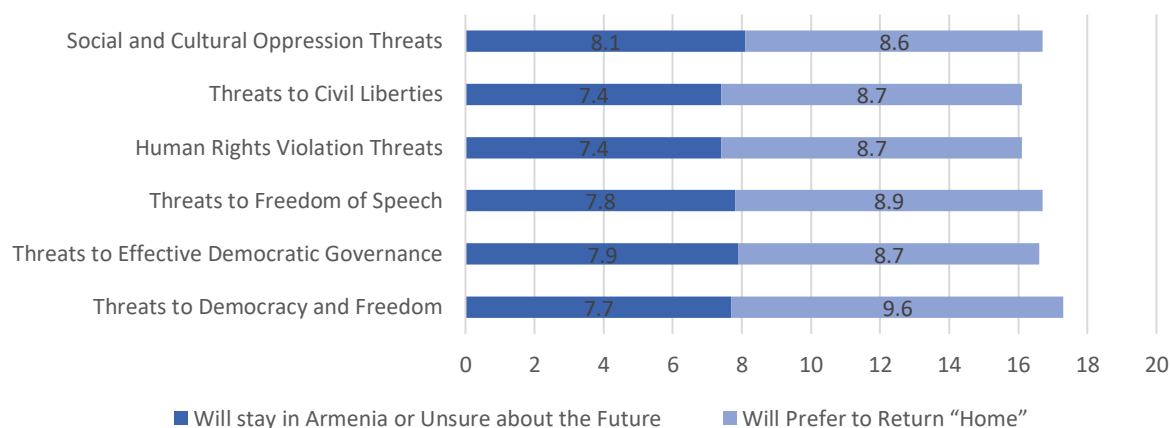
**Gender Perspective:** No Gender – specific correlations were found.

**Age-Related Concerns:** There were no significant age-related differences in perceptions of health inequity threats, indicating a widespread concern across various age groups.

**Occupational Variation:** Similarly, there were no significant occupational differences in the perception of health inequity threats, suggesting a common view of these threats across diverse professional sectors.

## Analysis of Freedom-Related Threats by Regional, Gender, Age-Related, and Occupational Groups

**Fig.8. Average Ratings of Freedom-Related Threats Category for Each of the Groups**



## 12. Threats to Democracy and Freedom

**Regional Variation:** No specific location-related correlations were found.

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh show heightened concerns about democratic threats, with women displaying a notable increase in anxiety about political rights.

*"I'm sure my mouth will be shut, and we won't be able to say anything." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

*"We are dealing with these problems even in Armenia. Naturally, if we return home to Karabakh and live under Azerbaijani rule, it will definitely happen." (Female, non-border urban settlement, unemployed, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)*

**Age-Related Concerns:** Young adults express the highest level of concern about threats to democracy and freedom, especially among those who intends to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, indicating deep fears about their future in an unstable democratic environment.

*"In our country, for example, they say whatever they want, sometimes, of course, nonsense." (Female, non-border urban settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)*

*"It is unnecessary to talk about freedom of speech at all. It is clear that it is a serious threat when we return home." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 18-30, prefers to return home.)*

**Occupational Variation:** Severe anxiety about democratic stability is observed especially among the former state institution and local government employees. They are reflecting strong fears about the suppression of democratic rights when they return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

*"It will never be possible to speak freely." (Male, border-adjacent rural settlement, former government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

## 13. Threats to Effective Democratic Governance

**Regional Variation:** Concerns about effective democratic governance are particularly pronounced in frontline areas, both rural and urban. Moreover, urban areas, whether border-adjacent or non-border, show higher levels of concern compared to rural areas. This indicates a broader perception of governance challenges in urban settings, which can be attributed to higher expectations for governance and greater exposure to administrative processes and their shortcomings.

*"Where there are Armenians, there is no shortage of corruption." (Female, non-border urban settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Comparative analysis reveals that concerns about the effectiveness of democratic governance are prevalent among both male and female respondents, with a marked increase in anxiety among those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh. Men exhibit a slightly higher overall level of concern compared to women, both among those staying in Armenia and those planning to return.



**Age-Related Concerns:** Young adults exhibit the highest level of concern, indicating deep fears about their future and the stability of democratic institutions.

*"They seem to be transparent democratic institutions, but when you face reality, you feel firsthand that everything is not as good as it is written on their Facebook pages." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement student, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)*

**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant differences in views on democratic governance across various occupational groups, indicating a broad recognition of governance challenges.

#### 14. Threats to Freedom of Speech

**Regional Variation:** The most significant increases in worries are observed in frontline areas, both rural and urban, where respondents fear severe restrictions on their ability to express themselves freely. This reflects widespread fears about censorship and speech restrictions.

*"In fact, there are cases of suppression of freedom of speech. For example, someone made a 'bad' post about the country's prime minister and was then 'instructed' to delete it. They were intimidated through fake pages, and so on." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, student, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Men show a higher overall level of concern than women, both among those staying in Armenia and those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

**Age-Related Concerns:** The most significant increases in concern are observed among middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old).

*"Even here in Armenia, I cannot say what I think. It is clear that if I were to return to Karabakh, the situation would be even worse." (Male, border-adjacent urban settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Occupational Variation:** Former state employees show the most dramatic increase in anxiety, reflecting severe fears of censorship. However, students exhibit a more moderate increase, indicating widespread but varying levels of concern about speech freedoms.

#### 15. Human Rights Violation Threats

**Regional Variation:** Concerns about human rights threats intensify in frontline areas.

*"Regarding human rights, it depends on which government will be in Karabakh. If it is Azerbaijani, then it can be said with certainty that there will be persecutions and torture, but in the case of Armenian leadership, this is excluded." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, local government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women exhibit heightened concerns about threats of human rights violations when planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh. However, men show a higher overall level of concern than women.

**Age-Related Concerns:** No age-specific correlations were found.

**Occupational Variation:** Former state institution employees show the most dramatic increase in concern, reflecting severe fears of rights abuses.

## 16. Threats to Civil Liberties

**Regional Variation:** Concerns about civil liberties were more pronounced among respondents in frontline areas, especially those who wish to return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

*"Everything is very unpredictable; it all depends on what leadership will be in Karabakh, Armenian or Azerbaijani." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Gender Perspective:** No gender-specific correlations were found.

**Age-Related Concerns:** No age-specific correlations were found.

**Occupational Variation:** No occupation-related correlations were found.

## 17. Social and Cultural Oppression Threats

**Regional Variation:** Across all regions, those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh consistently exhibit higher concerns about social and cultural oppression compared to those staying in Armenia. The most significant increases in concerns about returning to an area under different political control are observed in frontline areas, both rural and urban.

*"There are people who want to return to Karabakh, even if it is part of Azerbaijan, as it was in the Soviet years, but I have fears, because there was discrimination even then." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, local government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Gender Perspective:** Women see social and cultural oppression threats as significant obstacles for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh to be integrated into Armenia. This might be because they may face both general and gender-specific discrimination.

*"The phenomenon of discrimination exists in our nation. It was the same in Karabakh, one villager discriminated against another. I look at it calmly." (Female, non-borderline urban settlement, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*

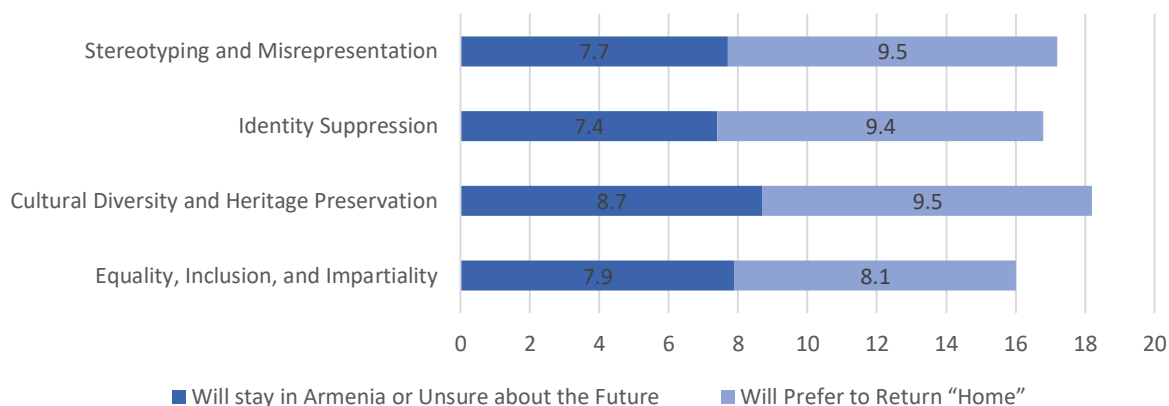
**Age-Related Concerns:** The most significant increases in anxiety are observed among middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old) and young adults (18-30 years old), indicating strong fears of discrimination and marginalization if they return to Karabakh.

*"If the Azerbaijanis are there, all these threats exist and are very risky." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)*

**Occupational Variation:** Former state institution employees show the most dramatic increase in concerns, reflecting severe fears of discrimination and marginalization due to their previous roles and affiliations. These individuals might also have more to lose, exacerbating their fears.

## Analysis of Identity-Related Threats by Regional, Gender, Age-Related, and Occupational Groups

Fig.10. Average Ratings of Identity-Related Threats Category for Each of the Groups



### 18. Threats to Equality, Inclusion, and Impartiality

**Regional Variation:** Across all regions, those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh consistently exhibit higher concerns about threats to equality, inclusion, and impartiality compared to those staying in Armenia. The most significant increases in anxiety are observed in frontline urban areas. Concerns remain high, reflecting widespread fears about equality and inclusion issues for both integrating into Armenia or returning to Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control.

*“There is no secret here; everyone knows that the people of Karabakh and Armenians are different. Of course, we are not talking about everyone, but the existence of such a phenomenon is an obvious fact.”* (Female, border-adjacent urban settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)

*“I am sorry to say this, but even Armenians make distinctions among themselves. No matter how much we turn a blind eye to the Karabakh-Armenian issue, the problem persists. I don't want to elaborate, but I have witnessed many such cases. Everyone sees the online bullying on the internet...”* (Female, border-adjacent urban settlement, student, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)

**Gender Perspective:** Men show a higher overall concern than women, both among those staying in Armenia and those planning to return. However, women’s concerns also increase significantly upon considering a return, indicating widespread fears of discrimination and unequal treatment across both genders.

*“They will definitely make distinctions between Christians and Muslims, which will have unpredictable consequences...”* (Male, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Age-Related Concerns:** The most significant increases in anxiety are observed among middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old) and individuals in their prime working years (30-45 years old), indicating strong fears of discrimination and unequal treatment for both integrating into Armenia or returning to Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control.

*“There will definitely be discrimination if Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together.”*  
(Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)

**Occupational Variation:** Across all occupational groups, those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh exhibit higher concerns about threats to equality, inclusion, and impartiality compared to those staying in Armenia. Local government workers show the most dramatic increase, reflecting severe fears of discrimination and unequal treatment.

*“It seems to me that the coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Karabakh is not possible after all this.”* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, former local government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

## 19. Threats to Cultural Diversity and Heritage Preservation

**Regional Variation:** The pattern of heightened concern among displaced people, especially in frontline areas, is evident given the historical context of cultural heritage being targeted after the 44-Day War in 2020. This aligns with the fears expressed by respondents and reflects a realistic apprehension of cultural assimilation and loss.

*“Even today we see what is happening to our cultural heritage, churches, cemeteries, they are all being destroyed by Azerbaijanis...”* (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, former local government employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)

**Gender Perspective:** Both men and women exhibit significant concerns about cultural threats, with men showing slightly higher anxiety. This reflects traditional roles in cultural preservation.

**Age-Related Concerns:** All age groups express significant concerns about cultural threats. The most pronounced fears are among young adults and middle-aged respondents, indicating a generational anxiety about losing cultural identity.

**Occupational Variation:** Former employees in state institutions show severe concerns about cultural threats, aligning with fears of systemic cultural erosion in potentially unstable governance environments.

## 20. Identity Suppression Threats

**Regional Variation:** Respondents in border-adjacent rural and urban areas planning to stay in Armenia express moderate concerns about identity suppression, while those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh exhibit significantly higher anxiety. This reflects deep fears of losing their cultural identity upon returning to Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control. In non-frontline rural areas, concerns are consistent between those who intend to stay in Armenia, those, undecided, and those who wish to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, indicating pervasive fears of identity suppression regardless of conflict exposure. In non-frontline urban areas, those who plan to stay in Armenia also show high concern, highlighting widespread fears of losing cultural identity even within Armenia.

*“For now, we live in Armenia, but we are going to leave because we don't see a chance to live here with dignity. The authorities are doing everything to humiliate the refugees even more. We will return if Artsakh is returned to us, the Armenians.”*  
(Female, non-border rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, uncertain about future plans.)



**Gender Perspective:** No gender-specific correlations were found.

**Age-Related Concerns:** The most significant increases in anxiety are observed among young adults (18-30 years old) and middle-aged respondents (45-60 years old), indicating strong fears of losing their cultural identity.

*"Azerbaijanis still teach school children to hate Armenians; we don't do anything like that." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

**Occupational Variation:** No occupational correlations were found.

## 21. Stereotyping and Misrepresentation

**Regional Variation:** The most significant increases in worry are observed in frontline urban areas, where respondents fear severe negative portrayals. Even in non-frontline areas, concerns remain high, reflecting widespread fears of stereotyping and misrepresentation. This often includes discussions about the stereotypes and misrepresentation faced by people from Nagorno-Karabakh within the communities where they have found refuge.

*"Of course, negative stereotypes are not spread in the media, but there are social networks where such conversations exist and are spread. Maybe not much, but the bad spreads sooner..." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, student, age group 18-30, uncertain about future plans.)*

*"Such phenomena are noticeable even in mass media with a large audience in Armenia, which is really a great threat and obstacle." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 18-30, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*

*"I have been in Armenia since 2020, and I have never heard any bad words about me. From no one. Not to me, not to my family. However, I often hear from different people, from the people of Karabakh, that they have had negative words said towards them. I don't know, maybe it comes from some individuals..." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to stay in Armenia.)*

**Gender Perspective:** No specific gender specific variations were highlighted in the responses.

**Age-Related Concerns:** The analysis did not reveal any specific age-related differences in perceptions of stereotyping and misrepresentation threats.

**Occupational Variation:** There were no significant occupational differences observed in the perception of stereotyping and misrepresentation threats among respondents.

## Additional Correlations Between Categories

### Security and Freedom

Concerns about physical security often correlate with fears about restrictions on freedoms. Respondents who are highly concerned about their physical safety also tend to worry about potential limitations on their civil liberties and freedom of speech. Those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rate physical threats (security) and threats to freedom of speech and civil liberties (freedom) very high, indicating a perception that increased security risks might come with a loss of personal freedoms.



*"My return is possible only to Armenian Artsakh, but all these threats will prevent me. Naturally, if I return to Armenian Artsakh, I will not be subjected to any discrimination or pressure. If there are minimal security guarantees, I will gladly return, and I do not consider the social situation to be a priority." (Female, non-border urban settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 18-30, prefers to return home.)*

### **Security and Welfare**

There is a correlation between concerns about physical security and economic stability. Respondents who feel insecure about their physical safety also express significant worries about their economic well-being, including job stability and access to essential services. High ratings for threats to physical existence are often accompanied by high ratings for threats to stable employment and adequate living standards. This suggests that instability in physical security directly impacts economic stability.

*"I had a business in Stepanakert and wanted to restart in Yerevan. However, after studying the situation, I realized that there is a high probability of unrest in Armenia, making it unfavorable for investments. But I have a family and children who need to be fed and provided for. Therefore, for now, I think we should go to another country where it will be safe." (Male, border-adjacent urban settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, uncertain about future plans.)*

### **Security and Identity**

Concerns about physical security often correlate with fears of identity suppression. Respondents who are highly anxious about physical threats also express deep fears about losing their cultural identity. Those who intend to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rate physical threats (security) and identity suppression threats (identity) very high, reflecting the interconnectedness of physical safety and cultural identity preservation.

*"I want to go home, but to live with dignity, as before the war of 2020. I hope for the presence of international forces with guarantees instead of Russian peacekeepers and Azerbaijanis. I want to return so that I don't have to go far from Artsakh." (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, retired, age group 60+, prefers to return home.)*

*"... Anyway, here in Armenia at least we have our language, our culture, we simply have no future when we go to Azerbaijani Karabakh. In two years, our identity will change completely." (Male, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

### **Freedom and Welfare**

Concerns about democratic governance and freedom of speech correlate with worries about welfare and social security. Respondents who rate threats to freedom highly also tend to express significant concerns about their welfare, including access to social services and employment. High concerns about threats to effective democratic governance are often accompanied by high ratings for threats to social security and stable employment, indicating that perceived governance failures impact social and economic well-being.



*"We did not stay in Armenia because my husband and I could not find jobs. After being displaced from Artsakh, we went to Russia. I am a doctor with many years of practice and secured a job in a private clinic. My husband started a business, and our children are in school. The rent for apartments here is much lower than in Armenia, and life feels safer. Therefore, we will probably stay in Russia. (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, uncertain about future plans.)"*

### **Freedom and Identity**

Concerns about freedom of speech and civil liberties correlate with fears about identity suppression and cultural diversity. Respondents who are anxious about their freedom to express themselves also worry about being able to preserve their cultural identity. Those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh rate threats to freedom of speech and civil liberties (freedom) and identity suppression threats (identity) very high, reflecting fears that their freedoms will be restricted along with their cultural expression.

*"How can we talk about human rights and freedoms when they are not respected in Azerbaijan? What hope do Armenians have in such a situation?" (Female, border-adjacent rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, prefers to return home.)*

### **Welfare and Identity**

Concerns about economic stability and social security correlate with fears about identity suppression and cultural diversity preservation. Respondents who express high concerns about their welfare also exhibit significant anxiety about their cultural identity. High ratings for threats to adequate living standards and stable employment (welfare) are often accompanied by high ratings for threats to cultural diversity and identity suppression (identity), suggesting that economic and social stability are critical for cultural preservation.

*"Azerbaijanis will do everything possible to keep Armenians injured, both socially and mentally." (Male, border-adjacent rural settlement, unemployed, age group 45-60, prefers to return home.)*

## **Uncovered Dilemmas and Contradictions**

### **Security vs. Freedom**

The study reveals a significant dilemma between the desire for physical security and the preservation of personal freedoms, particularly in the context of Azerbaijani policies towards the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Respondents, especially those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, express high concerns about physical threats, as well as threats to freedom of speech and civil liberties. This indicates a perception that their physical safety is not guaranteed under Azerbaijani governance and that any return might come with severe restrictions on their freedoms.

Under these circumstances, the dilemma is not about balancing security measures with personal freedoms but about the fundamental conflict between the lack of security and the suppression of freedoms. The Azerbaijani policy of preventing the return of the Armenian population to Nagorno-Karabakh exacerbates fears of physical violence and

aggression, while also posing a significant threat to their civil liberties and democratic rights. This creates a profound sense of insecurity and a fear of being unable to express their cultural and political identities freely.

### **Economic [In]Stability vs. Peace**

Economic threats are a major concern for respondents, especially those planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, but also for those who plan to stay in Armenia. High economic instability can drive individuals to prioritize immediate financial stability over long-term peace efforts. The economic disparity and lack of job opportunities exacerbate the tension between maintaining a livelihood and supporting peace initiatives. Economic instability can lead to social unrest and hinder peace-building efforts, highlighting a significant dilemma between the lack of economic stability and the pursuit of peace. The study underscores this challenge, emphasizing the contradiction between addressing immediate economic needs and focusing on long-term peace efforts.

### **Cultural Preservation vs. Integration**

The study highlights strong fears of identity suppression and cultural assimilation among "potential returnees" to Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as those who plan to stay in Armenia. This reflects a significant dilemma between preserving cultural identity and integrating into a different sociopolitical environment. Respondents express deep concerns about losing their cultural heritage under Azerbaijani rule, indicating a preference for cultural preservation over integration. The potential pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms in Azerbaijan presents a direct threat to the maintenance of Armenian cultural identity, creating a conflict between these two objectives. Many of those preferring to stay in Armenia after the displacement from Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 also express concerns about the risks of losing their Karabakhi cultural identity and assimilating into the norms prevailing in Armenia. In other words, among a number of respondents, there is a dominant fear of losing their "Artsakhti" identity while integrating into Armenian society.

*"For now, we live in Armenia, but we are planning to leave because we don't see a chance to live here with dignity. The authorities are doing everything to humiliate the refugees even more. We will return if Artsakh is returned to us, the Armenians."*  
(Female, non-border rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 30-45, uncertain about future plans.)

*"My plan is to stay in Armenia, but try to live like in Artsakh."* (Female, non-border rural settlement, private or public sector employee, age group 18-30, prefers to stay in Armenia.)



## Conclusion and Recommendations: Future Considerations

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The study conducted by Peace Dialogue NGO reveals a multifaceted understanding of the fundamental needs and fears of displaced individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh now residing in Armenia.

The study revealed that the primary difference between those planning to stay in Armenia and those intending to return to Nagorno-Karabakh lies in the intensity and focus of their concerns.

Respondents planning to return to Nagorno-Karabakh exhibit significantly higher levels of concern across all categories compared to those who prefer to stay in Armenia or are undecided. This group particularly emphasizes threats to identity, democratic governance, and cultural preservation.

Identity-related concerns have the highest average ratings among all groups, indicating the critical importance of maintaining cultural identity.

Freedom-related needs, particularly effective democratic governance and freedom of speech, are also highly prioritized.

For those staying in Armenia or undecided, the primary concerns revolve around general security, adequate living standards, and political stability. In contrast, 'potential returnees' focus intensely on physical threats, political and social threats, and fears related to democratic and cultural suppression under Azerbaijani control.

The following recommendations are designed to offer a comprehensive and realistic approach to addressing the complex needs of forcibly displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh who have found refuge in Armenia, with a long-term view of fostering the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process.

### **Support Economic Stability and Employment:**

- Provide funding for job creation programs and vocational training tailored to the needs of displaced individuals, enhancing their employability and economic independence.
- Support initiatives that foster small business development and entrepreneurship within displaced communities, promoting economic resilience and self-sufficiency.

### **Enhance Social Services, Infrastructure, and Living Standards:**

- Fund projects that improve access to healthcare, education, and social security for displaced individuals, ensuring they receive the necessary support to rebuild their lives.
- Invest in the development of infrastructure in areas hosting displaced communities, improving living conditions and facilitating integration.
- Improve access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and education, addressing the immediate needs of displaced communities and enhancing their quality of life.
- Develop and implement educational programs tailored to the needs of displaced children and youth, ensuring they receive quality education and support.

### **Improve Democratic Governance and Political Stability:**

- Undertake reforms to strengthen democratic governance, enhance transparency, and increase accountability, thereby building public trust in governmental institutions.
- Provide technical assistance and financial support to bolster democratic institutions in Armenia, ensuring they can effectively uphold democratic values and processes.
- Safeguard civil liberties and promote freedom of speech, ensuring that all citizens, including displaced individuals, can freely express their opinions and participate in the democratic process.
- Fund programs aimed at promoting freedom of speech, media independence, and civil liberties, thereby empowering displaced communities to voice their concerns and aspirations.

#### **Promote Social Cohesion and Integration:**

- Organize community-building activities that foster social cohesion between displaced individuals and local populations, promoting mutual understanding and support.
- Organize community-based cultural activities that promote and ensure the continuity of cultural practices, traditions, and the unique cultural identity of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, thereby contributing to the overall diversity and richness of Armenian culture.
- Provide counseling and mental health services to address the trauma experienced by displaced individuals, aiding their psychological recovery and well-being.

#### **Advocacy and Legal Support:**

- Advocate for the rights of displaced individuals at both national and international levels, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed in policy-making processes.
- Utilize all available international legal mechanisms to preserve Armenian cultural and historical heritage in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is currently under Azerbaijani control.
- Offer legal assistance to displaced individuals, helping them navigate legal challenges and ensuring their rights are protected.
- Develop and implement capacity-building and educational programs to raise awareness and knowledge among displaced individuals about their rights and the mechanisms available for redress in case of violations.

#### **Track-One and Track-Two Diplomacy Initiatives:**

- Support diplomatic efforts aimed at fostering political stability and peaceful negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, addressing the root causes of displacement.
- Promote sustained dialogue between Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society to address the concerns of displaced individuals and find mutually acceptable solutions to the conflict.
- Support confidence-building measures and track-two diplomacy initiatives that foster trust and understanding between the two nations, paving the way for lasting peace.



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> European Parliament, Plenary– October 2022; Question time: Heightening tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan/  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/733675/EPRS\\_ATA\(2022\)733675\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/733675/EPRS_ATA(2022)733675_EN.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> New Eastern Europe: What's behind the new round of clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan:  
<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/09/20/armenia-azerbaijan-pelosi-russia-ukraine/>

<sup>iii</sup> CivilNet.am: Who really are Azerbaijan's 'environmental activists' blockading Karabakh?:  
<https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/686152/who-really-are-azerbajians-environmental-activists-blockading-karabakh/>

<sup>iv</sup> Please, find the tool under the following link: <https://inclus.com/en/>

<sup>v</sup> Transcend International: A Peace Development Environment Network: The Basic Need Approach by Johan Galtung, Pg.12: <https://www.transcend.org/galtung/papers/The%20Basic%20Needs%20Approach.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Online Course on Transforming Civil Conflicts, Grenoble, 2011: Positions, Interests and Needs. Source: [https://www.irenees.net/bdf\\_fiche-experience-770\\_en.html](https://www.irenees.net/bdf_fiche-experience-770_en.html)

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