

Memorandum on the human rights of Karabakh Armenians displaced to Armenia

Introduction

1. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (hereinafter: “the Commissioner”) carried out a visit to Armenia from 3 to 5 February 2026. The human rights of Karabakh Armenians displaced to Armenia were one of the focus issues for examination.¹
2. The Commissioner fosters the effective observance of human rights, assists member states in the implementation of Council of Europe human rights instruments, identifies possible shortcomings in the law and practice concerning human rights and provides advice and information regarding the protection of human rights across the region.²
3. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Prime Minister, Tigran Khachatryan; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ararat Mirzoyan; the Minister of Justice, Srбуhi Galyan; the Minister of Internal Affairs, Arpine Sargsyan; the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Arsen Torosyan; the Chairperson of the Court of Cassation, Lilit Tadevosyan; the Standing Committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs of the National Assembly; the Armenian delegation to PACE; and the Human Rights Defender of Armenia (Ombuds), Anahit Manasyan. The Commissioner also engaged in discussions with the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Françoise Jacob, and representatives of UNHCR and UNFPA; the EU Ambassador, Vassilis Maragos; and with civil society organisations.
4. The Commissioner expresses appreciation to the Armenian authorities for their welcome, excellent cooperation and openness throughout the visit. He also extends his gratitude to representatives of civil society and international organisations for their constructive engagement and valuable insights.

I. Context

5. Following the September 2023 military operation by Azerbaijan in the Karabakh region, over 100,000 Karabakh Armenians fled to Armenia. As of December 2024, UNHCR had registered 115,388 persons displaced from the Karabakh region to Armenia.³ According to information provided by the Armenian authorities, a significant proportion of these persons were vulnerable groups such as older persons (18%), children (30%) and persons with disabilities (9%).
6. The number of arrivals of Karabakh Armenians in Armenia at the end of September 2023 averaged approximately 20,000 individuals per day. They arrived in a state of exhaustion, hunger and mental and physical distress, faced with an uncertain future.⁴ Armenian society demonstrated outstanding solidarity and the authorities swiftly mobilised emergency assistance: housing, social services, financial aid, and educational opportunities.

¹ See the Commissioner's end-of-visit [statement](#) of 10 February 2026 for an overview of all issues addressed during the visit. As other follow up to the visit, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) of 30 March 2026 to the Prime Minister of Armenia regarding the anti-discrimination framework and a [Memorandum](#) on Violence against Women in Armenia of 12 May 2026.

² [Resolution \(99\)50](#) on the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 1999.

³ UNHCR Armenia Refugee Situation [Overview](#), 18 December 2024.

⁴ See the observations by the Commissioner's predecessor: Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights [Observations](#) on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region, January 2024.

7. The Commissioner's predecessor, who visited Armenia in October 2023, noted that the authorities at all levels made remarkable efforts by providing all those in need with basic assistance, including accommodation in temporary shelters for those who did not have a place to stay with their family members or acquaintances. The need for all necessary support and assistance in the short, medium and long term was emphasised, with particular attention given to vulnerable groups.⁵
8. Since then, the situation has transitioned from an emergency phase to a long-term integration challenge, as described in section II. During a meeting in September 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan informed the Commissioner that Armenia's policy was now to support the integration of Karabakh Armenians in Armenia, including by helping them to obtain Armenian citizenship.
9. In section III, the Commissioner notes the goals of this transition: ensuring economic integration; improving housing opportunities; restoring identity and other key documents; securing citizenship or other ways to ensure legal residency; and achieving social inclusion. The Commissioner welcomes the authorities' recognition of these challenges and the ongoing efforts to adapt support programmes by making them more inclusive, prioritising the most vulnerable and fostering self-reliance.

II. Progress in the Integration of Karabakh Armenians

10. The Commissioner acknowledges Armenia's progress in moving towards integrating Karabakh Armenians. This progress is reflected in positive statistical trends in several key areas, including the provision of legal residence, housing, employment, and other forms of social support.
11. Armenia has taken significant steps towards addressing the issue of the lack of Armenian citizenship among Karabakh Armenians, which has an impact on the prospect of long-term integration. In the past two years, the number of citizenships granted has increased almost fivefold. As of February 2026, over 20,000 Karabakh Armenians had been granted citizenship following their applications, compared to 10,659 as of August 2025 and 4,400 as of November 2024. In addition, 8,850 children have been granted Armenian citizenship in connection with their parents' status. According to the Armenian authorities, none of the citizenship applications lodged by Karabakh Armenians that had been processed by the time of the Commissioner's visit had been rejected.
12. In parallel, Armenia continued to extend temporary protection for Karabakh Armenians who had not obtained citizenship. The temporary protection, under which Karabakh Armenians are granted group-based refugee status without individual asylum assessments, has been maintained through annual renewals and has enabled holders of this status to continue to reside legally in Armenia.
13. As of the time of the visit, 4,404 Karabakh Armenians had obtained housing certificates entitling them to state financial support for acquiring residential property. As the purchased property is also intended for use by other family members, it is estimated that the number of people who could benefit from this housing opportunity is significantly higher. Those who did not qualify for this support programme could still be eligible for rent-related subsidies (see paragraph 21).
14. As of December 2025, 25,558 Karabakh Armenians were employed in Armenia. This figure rose to 31,369 when individual entrepreneurs and business representatives were taken into account. The government has introduced several employment programmes aimed at promoting self-sufficiency, including tax incentives and financial grants for starting small businesses.
15. The government also ensured that displaced pupils could continue their education. A total of 20,199 pupils were enrolled in Armenian schools. Thus, their enrolment rate reached the same level as that of the general population.

⁵ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights [Observations](#) on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region, January 2024.

16. Progress in these areas has been achieved in cooperation with international organisations, including UN agencies, the European Union, and a range of national and international NGOs. Continuous engagement of the international community will be important in sustaining progress in the integration of Karabakh Armenians.

III. Outstanding Issues around the Integration of Karabakh Armenians

1. Legal status, citizenship and documentation

17. One of the remaining barriers to the integration of Karabakh Armenians is that many of them lack Armenian citizenship. They possess “070” code passports, which were issued by Armenia to Karabakh inhabitants for international travel purposes. Citizenship is a prerequisite for accessing certain benefits, such as the state-supported housing scheme, certain social services, public employment, and political participation. Although the number of citizenships granted has grown markedly, only around a quarter of all displaced Karabakh Armenians have obtained Armenian citizenship (see paragraph 11).
18. According to the Commissioner's interlocutors, the process of obtaining citizenship has been simplified in general, including through the recently introduced digital application process. However, the process remains administratively demanding in cases where supporting documents are unavailable due to the displacement. The Commissioner was also informed that some Karabakh Armenians feared that obtaining Armenian citizenship may undermine their identity and prevent them from exercising their right to return or from making property claims in the future.
19. The restoration of identity and other key documents of Karabakh Armenians has remained difficult, given the challenges of recovering archives and accessing records left or lost in the Karabakh region. The Commissioner observes that, for many, the only way to restore such documents is to undergo lengthy judicial proceedings, sometimes lasting years, which involve significant court fees and legal representation costs. These delays hinder access to citizenship, pensions, education, housing programmes and other entitlements. The Commissioner also notes reports that even when first-instance courts rule in favour of Karabakh Armenians in such cases, further delays are possible in cases where the authorities decide to appeal the judgment.
20. While some interlocutors considered that Armenian citizenship could help address statelessness among Karabakh Armenians, the Commissioner highlights the importance of providing accessible and comprehensive information to ensure that persons can make a free and informed choice between Armenian citizenship and temporary protection.

2. Housing

21. As part of the initial emergency response, the Armenian government provided Karabakh Armenians with monthly subsidies to cover rent and related expenditures, supporting over 100,000 individuals in the first phase. In 2025, the amount of these subsidies was reduced. Furthermore, eligibility for subsidies was limited to vulnerable groups, such as children, retired people and persons with disabilities. The authorities explained this policy shift as a way of encouraging working-age individuals to become self-sufficient and provide for their families through employment. In this context, the Commissioner notes the concerns raised by representatives of the Karabakh Armenian community regarding the significant impact of this policy shift on their lives at a time when their savings were being depleted. He also notes that Karabakh Armenians have held several protests against the changed policy.
22. Although the state financial support programme for acquiring residential property represents significant progress (see paragraph 13), less than half of the recipients of housing certificates entitling them to this support (1,936 of 4,400) managed to use them. This has been explained by the fact that the value of the certificates often did not match real market prices in areas with viable employment, making families move toward remote locations with limited job prospects. In addition, many recipients were unable to bridge the gap through bank loans due to a lack of regular income.

23. According to UNHCR, the majority (around 76 per cent) of the total displaced population reside in Yerevan and its surrounding regions.⁶ In this respect, the Commissioner notes the concerns of several interlocutors regarding the need to adjust the housing programme to reconcile the state's interests in regional development in rural areas with the disparity of employment opportunities available there.
24. The Commissioner observes that access to the state financial support programme for acquiring residential property is still conditional on obtaining Armenian citizenship. The impact of this programme should be monitored closely to accommodate the situation of those who cannot yet obtain citizenship.

3. Strategy, coordination and participation

25. Despite several programmatic efforts, Armenia lacks a comprehensive integration strategy that would provide a clear policy framework for Karabakh Armenians. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommended that the Armenian authorities adopt an Integration Strategy accompanied by suitable financial resources and capacity-building activities that would ensure the effective implementation of concrete support actions for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, as well as any other persons or groups of persons in similar situations.⁷
26. Civil society representatives informed the Commissioner that Karabakh Armenians are often not included or consulted in decision-making affecting their lives, and that dialogue with the authorities on such matters has been complicated.

4. The situation of Karabakh Armenian women

27. As the Commissioner mentioned in his thematic memorandum on violence against women in Armenia, the armed conflicts in the region and displacements they caused have intensified the risks of violence against women.⁸ The national security and militarisation narratives reinforce patriarchal norms and increase social pressure related to gender, marriage, reproduction and caregiving. Civil society organisations report that women facing intersecting discrimination, such as displaced women, are exposed to a higher risk of violence.⁹
28. According to civil society organisations working on women's rights in Armenia, the conflict has had a profound impact on women, particularly affecting their societal roles and increasing their exposure to violence.¹⁰ The war placed considerable burdens on them, requiring that they manage households under extreme stress while also bearing greater economic and caregiving responsibilities. In this context, many marginalised women face limited access to critical services and protections.¹¹

5. Right to return

29. While the Armenian government's main strategy has been long-term integration, the right to return to the Karabakh region continues to hold significant importance for Karabakh Armenians, given their profound connection to the region and aspiration to re-establish ties with their places of origin.
30. The Commissioner acknowledges the sensitivities around this issue amid the ongoing peace process and encourages continued efforts to uphold the human rights of Karabakh Armenians, including the right to return. He invites the authorities to ensure that displaced Karabakh Armenians are fully informed and supported in making free choices about their future.

⁶ UNHCR Armenia Refugee Situation [Overview](#), 18 December 2024.

⁷ ECRI [Conclusions](#) on the implementation of the recommendations in respect of Armenia subject to interim follow-up, 2 July 2025 (CRI(2025)30). In 2025, ECRI concluded that this recommendation had not been implemented and stated that such a strategy should be drawn up without any further delay.

⁸ Commissioner's [Memorandum](#) on Violence against Women in Armenia of 12 May 2026.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ [Submission](#) to the Universal Periodic Review of Armenia, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, May 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

V. Recommendations

The Commissioner recommends that the Armenian authorities take the following steps:

1. Adopt a comprehensive integration strategy defining the policies regarding Karabakh Armenians. The strategy should be human rights based, establish clear objectives, concrete support actions, and suitable financial resources, and should be developed in line with international standards and in consultation with the concerned groups.
2. Ensure the meaningful participation of Karabakh Armenians in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies that concern their lives through regular consultation at national and regional levels; promote transparent, regular communication with Karabakh Armenians to keep them informed of their rights, available support, and integration opportunities.
3. Monitor and regularly evaluate integration measures to ensure that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of Karabakh Armenians and adapt these measures as necessary.
4. Continue to facilitate access to Armenian citizenship for Karabakh Armenians, including through raising awareness and simplifying application procedures.
5. Extend temporary protection for Karabakh Armenians for as long as the protection needs remain.
6. Simplify and expedite the procedure for restoration and recognition of civil status, identification, employment, education and other documents of Karabakh Armenians; consider abolishing court fees for such proceedings and providing targeted legal aid to those in need.
7. Adjust the state financial support programme for acquiring residential property to better reflect the needs of displaced families in light of the employment and housing contexts in Armenia.
8. Preserve and regularly assess the adequacy of financial support for vulnerable groups such as children, older persons, and persons with disabilities; and where necessary, adapt eligibility rules for rent-related subsidies to prevent the exclusion of those in need.
9. Ensure the protection of displaced women and girls by strengthening the capacity and responsiveness of law enforcement and other relevant agencies, and by expanding access to protection and support services provided by shelters and support centres.¹²
10. Acknowledge the importance that the right to return to the Karabakh region continues to hold for Karabakh Armenians and ensure that displaced Karabakh Armenians are fully informed and supported in making free choices about their future.

¹² See the Commissioner's recommendations relating to combating violence against women in Armenia: [Memorandum](#) on Violence against Women in Armenia of 12 May 2026.