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The “Great Return” to Liberated Territories: Exploring the Prospects and

Challenges of Urban-rural Migration

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Abstract

The liberation of Karabakh after 30 years has created opportunities to relocate the Azerbaijani IDPs back to their hometowns. Therefore, the government of Azerbaijan has established the “Great Return” program in terms of restoring infrastructure and improving the living conditions of the Azerbaijani IDPs in the liberated territories. Thus, this capstone project aims to analyze the possible strategy challenges of urban-rural migration in the “Great Return” program. To identify the willingness of the Azerbaijani IDPs to resettle in their hometowns, seven semi-structured interviewees from different regions of the liberated areas were selected. Interview results show that IDPs have access to various employment options and advanced healthcare services in Baku. Therefore, they are reluctant to move to the liberated areas. This study focuses on the policy alternative of developing regions by decentralizing Baku to reduce overpopulation and create residential, educational, and professional opportunities in the newly liberated territories of Karabakh. The research recommends that providing education and employment opportunities to IDPs can make the region more appealing for their relocation. Additionally, it suggests that clearing landmines and maintaining the peace treaty can stabilize the economy in the liberated areas and improve relations with neighboring regions.

Keywords: The “Great Return” program, liberated Karabakh, security challenges, mine clearance program, decentralization

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	4
1.2. Methodology	8
Chapter 2. Problem Description	13
2.1. Heavily mined regions and Presence of Armenian Troops as Security Concerns for Azerbaijani IDPs	13
2.2. Lack of Housing and Infrastructure in Liberated Areas	15
2.3 Psychological Trauma in the Aftermath of the Conflict.....	18
2.4 Lack of Trust of IDPs in the “Great Return” Program	22
Chapter 3. Policy alternatives	25
3.1 Returning Khankendi and negotiating a final peace agreement with Armenia	25
3.2. Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku.....	31
3.3. Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs	35
3.4. Creation of Economic Incentives to Build Trust in the “Great Return” Program.....	36
Chapter 4. Evaluation of policy alternatives	38
Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations.....	45
References.....	50

List of Abbreviations

ANAMA- Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action
IDPs- Internally Displaced Persons
IMAS- International Mine Action Standards
ISIL -Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
MP- Member of Parliament
OSCE - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
TSD- Trilateral Strategic Dialogue
UK- The United Kingdom
UN – The United Nations
UNDP- The United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Chapter 1. Introduction

The escalation of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia started in the 1980s and it was halted by a cease-fire in 1994. As a result of this conflict, nearly twenty percent of Azerbaijan's territory was occupied by Armenia, including Mountainous Karabakh itself and seven adjacent districts that were formerly home to Azerbaijani people (Cornell & Starr, 2006).

Map 1. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and surrounding occupied territories in Azerbaijan.



Source: *The London Post*, thelondonpost.net

Consequently, Azerbaijan received nearly one million IDPs due to the occupation. Along with the over 300,000 Azerbaijani refugees that fled from Armenia starting in 1988, around 600,000 and 800,000 internally displaced persons were also forced to flee to different regions of Azerbaijan from Nagorno Karabakh and surrounding territories (see Map1). This means that 10 to 15% of the total population of Azerbaijan was IDPs (Cornell, 1997).

Since 1994's cease-fire, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) established a Minsk Group which consisted of three Co-Chairs, the Russian Federation, the United States, and France, to solve the problem via diplomatic talks. However, the role of the Minsk Group in the resolution of the conflict was observed debatable since the conflict has not been solved over the years and remained a 'frozen' conflict till 2020. According to Abilov (2018), the position of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs was viewed more as preservers of stability in the region to protect their national interests rather than to serve as a venue for ongoing negotiations and create a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Abilov , 2018).

Furthermore, the conflict was facilitated by the ongoing rise in military spending by both the Baku and Yerevan governments. In fact, on April 2 -5, 2016, one of the most bloody of these confrontations took place in which Azerbaijan reclaimed part of its conquered areas. Moreover, after 30 years (on September 27, 2020), in response to the large-scale front-line provocation by the Armenian armed forces, the Azerbaijani Army launched a counter-offensive operation, later called "Operation Iron Fist". The war was called the Second Karabakh War and "Operation Iron Fist" had two objectives to achieve: "to expel the units of the Armenian Army from the occupied Azerbaijani lands and ensure the return of about one million IDPs" (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021). As the Second Karabakh War's outcome provided a possibility for IDPs to return to their homes, the government formed the "Great Return" Program.

1.1.The "Great Return" Program

Since Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity as a result of the Second Karabakh War, the president of Azerbaijan signed a decree in 2022 approving the first stage of the "Great Return" program to liberated territories of Azerbaijan. The scope of the program is to

implement purposeful and large-scale projects to serve the rapid revival of the Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur economic regions.

The program aims for providing the sustainable settlement of the population and the provision of sustainable economic activity, as well as the creation of a foundation for the transformation of these areas into highly developed regions. The official document "Socio-economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2022-2026" was signed by the president of Azerbaijan -Mr. Aliyev indicates that the "Great Return" program is one of Azerbaijan's five national priorities (President. az, 2021).

Furthermore, the liberation of long-occupied areas in the Karabakh region has created opportunities for the return of IDPs to their hometowns. In this case, the "Great Return" program affects various areas of the country especially the economy due to investment in rebuilding and improving the current infrastructure after liberation (President. az, 2021). This is a substantial expenditure on the government budget and has a huge impact on the economy on an internal events basis and its central government's utmost intention to regulate the fluctuations with a strong policy.

The efforts to rebuild the infrastructure in liberated areas will take years as the captured areas by Armenians were drastically damaged as well as planted mines which cause challenges and disruptions to smoothly constructing living sites in the Karabakh region (Azernews, 2022). Besides, it is worth mentioning that IDPs have conservations and insecurities to return to their hometowns due to security risks and the potential restart of the war with the enemy. IDPs have the "right to be secured against forcible relocation to or resettlement in any region where their life, security liberty, and/or health would be at risk," stated the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (United Nations, 2001). The potential approach for the government to follow is to lay out the prospects to people who

would then voluntarily move back to the Karabakh region as part of the urban-rural migration policy field (Davoudi & Stead, 2002).

Overall, the process of returning liberated areas can be difficult and complex, requiring careful planning, coordination, and support from the international community. While the prospects of restoring sovereignty and promoting economic growth are important, the issues of rebuilding communities, promoting reconciliation, and addressing security risks can be formidable.

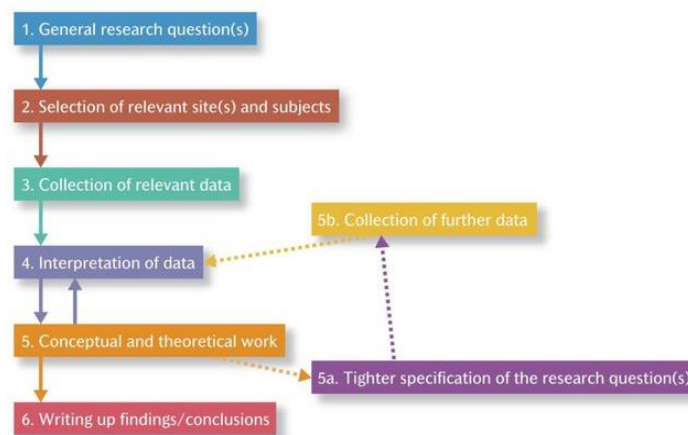
Hence, the research aims to explore the challenges being faced during the “Great Return” to the Karabakh region and lay out them according to the reasoning behind them. Alternately, the goal is to focus on the prospects of the return and understand to what extent the prospects are pushed back due to challenges people are facing during the move back to liberated areas. Nevertheless, the next section covers the methodology of this study.

1.2. Methodology

A *qualitative* research strategy is selected to formulate the research problem and conduct analyses. “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection of data and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2012).

Therefore, the qualitative research strategy is applicable to use for understanding the concerns of IDPs and policy challenges. In this regard, the research is carried out according to the following steps (see Figure 1). Firstly, research questions and target groups are identified. Then, data was collected, and it was interpreted by the researchers. The problem of the research is drawn as the result of data analyses. It is needed, the interpretation of data is applied again for analyzing documents and the “Great Return” program. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are presented as the outcome of the research.

Figure 1. An outline of the main steps of qualitative research



Source: Bryman 2012, p.370

Furthermore, one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that the “researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam, 2002). Thus, the authors of this research collected the data via primary and secondary sources. Therefore, focused group interviews, existing literature, and articles produced by the government of Azerbaijan regarding the “Great Return” program are included. Semi-structured focused

group interviews with seven participants from the Karabakh region: Fuzuli, Shusha, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin are chosen as primary resources. The intention of the selected this specific focused group is to understand their motivation and concerns to relocate to liberated lands and start their life in those areas. Consequently, seven interviewees were chosen based on the acquaintance of the authors. Email invitations stating the purpose and concept of the interview were sent ahead of the participants to get their confirmation for participating in this research. The interview was scheduled for a two-hour slot which was conducted on the 1st of April and held through the Teams application online.

The interviewees were asked the following set of five questions:

1. *What are the challenges posed by urban-rural migration on both you and your immediate family?*
2. *What do you consider important in your lives in Karabakh?*
3. *How do you envision your life being different in Karabakh compared to Baku?*
4. *What do you see as the most significant opportunities for those who are moving from Baku to Karabakh?*
5. *Are you planning on moving to the liberated territories? Do you want to go back and live there permanently?*

The first and second questions target understanding what interviewees consider as important for their future life in Karabakh. These questions are used to identify possible factors that need to be present for a smooth relocation. Moreover, the third and fourth questions explore the potential challenges that IDPs may face after their return. The last

question intends to know the reasonings and opinions of the target group to move to Karabakh permanently.

The participants of the focused group interview are from different age groups, starting from 25 and up to 65, and included both males and females. Originally participants are from Fuzuli, Shusha, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin which gave the diversity in the group from the perspective of demography and geography. All the interviewees are living in Baku. Regarding the professional background of the interviewees six of them are employed in the oil and gas, information technology, education, and medical sectors, and one of them is retired recently.

Furthermore, *secondary sources* are used to contribute to the analysis of the primary data by adding different perspectives from economic possibilities and benchmarking the return process in other countries for comparison and feasibility. The government of Azerbaijan throughout 30 years had executed different policies to support the living standards of IDPs and launched committees and funds to directly deal with their problems. The government has created policies in favor of refugees that assisted their financial situation and created possibilities to expand the job opportunities for them to support their families (Rzayev, 2015). Besides, the secondary data sources took a look into the practice of Middle Eastern countries in the example of Iraq after the liberation. The worldwide practice lays out the challenges and preventive actions taken to support the process of relocation and stabilization in liberated areas. Benchmarking helps to understand the best way of return and explore the feasibility of each approach per the economic, political, and social conditions of the country (UNDP, 2019)

To analyze the results of the interview, *a thematic analysis* method is deployed. The strategy is to code and categorize interview findings into different themes so that authors

could use them to compare the results to the existing literature review on the study topic. The findings of the interview are linked to secondary research material to interpret the data. It is a useful strategy to find the consistency between the academic literature, interview results, and research questions. The authors benefit from using the thematic analysis method as it is an appropriate method to handle large amounts of data by splitting them into various operational categories (Bryman, 2012).

The research project's focus is the "Great Return" program to liberate Karabakh, the most critical limitation is the availability of data due to the recent nature of the events. As the project's scope is limited to Azerbaijan, it creates challenges in finding relevant data sources and analyzing them to derive policy recommendations. Another constraint that should be noted regarding the accessibility of data sources is the vulnerability of the research study to potential bias. This means that the conclusions drawn from the study may be based on limited evidence or an excessive interpretation of the data that is available.

Besides, as the focused group interview included only seven participants the findings create generalizations on the opinion of a limited number of people due to accessibility to find interviewees, their willingness to take part, and the limited time of authors and participants overlapping.

The capstone paper consists of five chapters that analyze the challenges and prospects associated with Great Return to liberated Karabakh and draft policy recommendations on how to motivate and attract citizens to relocate. The first chapter focuses on the introduction of the research paper and background information about the "Great Return" Program. Correspondingly, it covers methods used for collecting and analyzing the data. Moreover, the second chapter is a deep dive into the research problem by highlighting different aspects of policy problems. The third chapter focuses on policy alternatives

followed by the fourth chapter on their evaluation. The last chapter is the conclusion and recommendations for future analyses.

Chapter 2. Problem Description

After the first Karabakh War, the territories of Karabakh as well as in the surrounding districts Aghdam, Jabrail, Fuzuli, Kalbajar, Gubadli, Lachin, and Zangilan of Azerbaijan were under the occupation of Armenian occupation for almost three decades. As a result of the war infrastructure and nature were destroyed and people of Azerbaijani nationalities were forced to flee from their homes by Armenian troops.

The post-war assessment of the Azerbaijani government indicates that infrastructure, such as buildings for living, healthcare, schools, and so forth, needs to be restored from scratch in most parts of the territories. Thus, the process of resettlement to Karabakh can take several years and it can cause some obstacles for implicating the “Great Return” program. Nevertheless, the following obstacles in the realization of the “Great Return” program are observed as the outcome of interviews and secondary resources.

2.1. Heavily mined regions and Presence of Armenian Troops as Security Concerns for Azerbaijani IDPs

One of the main security issues associated with the “Great Return” program to the liberated areas is the presence of mines and unexploded ammunition. For approximately thirty years, Armenia has extensively laid landmines in various regions of Azerbaijani territory that it has occupied. Since there is a risk of explosions, this situation slows down the progress in the region and delays the process of resettlement. Therefore, the explosions caused by landmines in the newly liberated Azerbaijani territory result in daily incidents of civilians or military personnel being injured or killed (azernews, 2022). For instance, approximately 30 Azerbaijani citizens, including two journalists, have lost their lives, and around 130 civilians have been injured since Armenia signed the surrender agreement on

November 10, 2020. Azerbaijan ranks among the countries with the highest rate of landmine incidents globally (Azernews, 2022). Consequently, many IDPs are hesitant to register for visiting Karabakh due to the explosion hazard of mines in the liberated areas. They consider it unsafe to return to their homes (*from personal communication with an IDP from Aghdam, April 1, 2023*).

Furthermore, Armenia refuses to release precise minefield maps. Only 25% of the maps that Armenia was required to provide for three regions are accurate (Caspiannews, 2021). To address the urgent and life-threatening situation in the newly reclaimed areas, the president of Azerbaijan issued a decree on January 15, 2021, calling for the establishment of a Mine Clearance Agency. The main responsibility of the agency is to clear mines, unexploded ordnance, explosive devices, and other explosive remnants from previously occupied territories, as well as other areas impacted by war and military operations. The agency possesses the authority to plan and coordinate activities in the relevant field. (Mine Action Review, 2022). Moreover, there are still ongoing security concerns since Armenian troops are present in some occupied territory of Azerbaijan.

Although a ceasefire has been established between Armenia and Azerbaijan, *occasional clashes* still occur, posing a threat to the security of people living close to the incidents (Azerbaijan24, 2023). Some cities continue to face military attacks from remaining Armenian forces, raising concerns about the long-term security needed for people to return to the Karabakh region field (Broers, ChathamHouse, 2016). Therefore, the security situation in the affected villages remains uncertain and fragile. This instability is one of the primary reasons why some families are reluctant to return to their homes. The presence of Armenian armed groups in residential areas is a concern for IDPs, and families fear for the safety of the children when sending them to school (*from personal communication with an IDP from Aghdam, April 1, 2023*).

Hence, the main concern expressed by those interviewed was the safety of their families returning home. One participant specifically mentioned that the news about mines and occasional attacks is frightening to consider relocation. The sense of feeling safe in their own homes and on the streets of their hometown is a crucial factor for interviewed IDPs, as they question the reasoning for moving and facing fears when they could instead continue their peaceful lives in the capital. The interviews also revealed that IDPs have already experienced the fear of being displaced from Karabakh, and they want to ensure that such a traumatic experience will not happen again to them or their family members in the future (*from personal communication with IDPs from Karabakh, April 1, 2023*).

In a nutshell, the unstable security situation, the presence of armed groups, and the danger of landmines hinder the return of IDPs. Nevertheless, it is not just the factors mentioned above that prevent the return of IDPs to their home; limited availability of housing in conflict-affected areas is also a crucial obstacle.

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2.2. Lack of Housing and Infrastructure in Liberated Areas

Additional significant barriers preventing a substantial number of IDPs from returning include housing shortages and inadequate infrastructure, particularly in areas damaged during military operations. These challenges manifest in various forms, encompassing issues with the original infrastructure of IDPs' home areas, as well as housing-related problems and the destruction of household belongings due to demolition and damage. By the order signed by President I. Aliyev regarding financial support for the civilian population affected by the conflict, households with destroyed or damaged houses are eligible to receive 6000 manats for the property damage, 1500 manats per person for

personal belongings damage, and 1000 manats per family for other damages (Azvision, 2020) To provide compensation for the agricultural lands damaged during the attacks, funds from the President of Azerbaijan's reserve fund were allocated as follows: 1,400,000 manats to the Ministry of Agriculture in the state budget for 2021, 5,200,000 manats to the Ministry of Finance for compensating material damage to civilian property, and 30,000,000 manats to the State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture (President.az, 2021).

However, *housing remains a fundamental issue* that prolongs displacement due to two main reasons: the destruction of homes and challenges related to property ownership and restitution. When asked about the primary reasons for their reluctance to return to their original location, a significant number of individuals cite the extensive damage suffered by their homes as a justifiable concern (Jafer, Imana, Doda, & Lemessa, 2022). According to interviewees, in the initial years of their move to Baku, their families had constant issues with documentation, particularly in proving their identity without having official documents. It required significant time and effort for them to arrange their paperwork, establish ownership of housing, and secure employment. Currently, they consider the process as a challenge to reclaim their homes in Karabakh and surrounding regions in the same size and condition, including features such as spacious gardens. IDPs prefer houses reminiscent of their childhood rather than newly constructed modern apartments, as they wish to evoke the connection, they and their families share three decades ago (*from personal communication with IDPs from Kalbajar and Aghdam, April 1, 2023*).

Moreover, the government of Azerbaijan has laid the foundation of the 'smart village' and 'smart city' project in Karabakh for the first time (President.az, 2022). Since the 1990s, the term 'smart' has been used to describe cities that utilize advanced technology

and big data to create a more dynamic infrastructure (Albino, Berardi, & Dangelico, 2015).

Nonetheless, a potential issue faced by elderly residents in smart villages can be their lack of familiarity or comfort with smart technology, leading to a lack of necessary skills for proper usage. Concerns about data privacy and a reluctance to embrace modern technology also exist (*from personal communication with IDPs from Aghdam and Zangilan*), April 1, 2023).

Furthermore, *the absence of adequate infrastructure and limited availability of income-generating job opportunities* in the original location of the IDPs contribute to economic challenges which in turn make them hesitant to return. Efforts to integrate and empower youth in public life and provide them with decent employment opportunities may have certain gaps and weaknesses. This could be due to the nature and effectiveness of this program or the cultural alignment of the cities and regions where these youth belong (Cavanaugh, 2016). Likewise, regional instability and geopolitical conditions also contributed to the unemployment of youth. The Covid-19 pandemic, the second Karabakh war, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict have significantly impacted the unemployment rate in Azerbaijan. Data reveals that the unemployment rate in Azerbaijan rose from 4,85%, in 2019 to it 6,58% in 2021 (Labadie, 2022). Thus, several internal and external factors led to changes in the unemployment rate through the years. As the data shows that the unemployment rate has increased in Azerbaijan, a lack of workplaces and infrastructure in the liberated areas can worsen the situation. In this regard, economic uncertainty is the main challenge for IDPs which creates a state of complete unpredictability due to the influx of labor. Without proper housing and job prospects, IDPS prefer to remain in their current relocated areas rather than in Karabakh. Job opportunities are a crucial factor as a limited range of options are only available in the liberated areas due to restructuring. When

considering a cost-benefit analysis, IDPs would be reluctant to relocate to Karabakh for low-income jobs (*from personal communication with IDPs from Jabrayil, Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin, April 1, 2023*). However, it is not just the material issues, such as a lack of housing and infrastructure that are identified as difficulties for IDPs to their relocation, but psychological factors similarly play a role in having reluctance to move back to Karabakh.

2.3 Psychological Trauma in the Aftermath of the Conflict

Another obstacle associated with the IDPs' unwillingness to relocate to Karabakh, and surrounding regions is the trauma and stress that they have experienced due to the war and its aftermath's drastic impact on them.

The severity of Azerbaijan's social problems is deepening as a result of long-running external conflict, as well as political and economic instability. Azerbaijan has been exposed to a series of crises and difficulties, which caused problems to worsen and intensify in terms of impact and result. Internally Displaced Persons who haven't been resettled are still staying in places like collective centers, mud huts, abandoned apartments, and relatives' houses. In informal settlements, some people are threatened with eviction. Housing conditions are unsatisfactory and plumbing and there is in need for electricity infrastructure. Some IDPs' physical safety is at hazard since they reside close to the line of contact, where gunfire is often exchanged. Due to the lack of employment areas, many IDPs are dependent on government aid and are moving to urban areas in search of employment (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2008).

Considering that IDPs have been living in Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan for nearly 30 years and they have already established their career, they purchased properties that can be problematic to leave. Inequal opportunities IDPs have spent their time to adapt living in

different cities and striving to gain equal opportunities in education and employment. However, with the liberation the idea of returning to lands where they have left years before or have never been there requires time and effort to recreate the same standard of living conditions they worked for years (*from personal communication with IDPs from Jabrayil, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar, Lachin April 1, 2023*).

Changing place names in academic studies on the cities of Azerbaijan that were occupied for 30 years, smuggling historical artifacts abroad, from the removal of cemeteries to the looting of trees. For example, Sipahi and Özsoy (2017), in their study on the city of Shusha, claimed that with the attacks and destructions, the existence of Azerbaijanis in the said geography was tried to be destroyed, and an urban massacre was carried out in Shusha through the directly targeted cultural structures, libraries, educational institutions and places of worship. Again, in another study, with the direct targeting of the cities, not only the ties of the Azerbaijani people with their homeland were severed, but also the occupied places were quickly Armenianized; It is stated that in this process, cities are also “desired” and condemned to loneliness (Özsoy, Sipahi, & Khashimov, 2020, p. 440). The aforementioned studies show that the damage in the occupied areas is not only material; They are noteworthy in that they show that all values with historical, cultural, religious, and symbolic significance have been targeted in some way. The concern mentioned by interviewees was also regarding the time and effort that would be needed from the community living in Karabakh to restore the historical and cultural values and transfer them to the next generations (*from personal communication with IDPs from Shusha, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar April 1, 2023*).

Geographically focused studies in conflict-affected areas of Azerbaijan show that the main social challenges are the lack of social cohesion and worries about the original region, including shocks and fears of discriminatory practices, marginalization, and violent

behavior triggered by societal tensions, and the complexity of rebuilding the Azerbaijani social fabric and overcoming what the past carried, whether as a result of the violent action that the displaced were subjected to, or a result of a social tension that was caused by a past event (*from personal communication with IDPs from Shusha, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar, April 1, 2023*).

In addition to the difficulties that displaced people encounter when they try to obtain or renew civil documents because many of them lost their documents during displacement or had them taken away from them, and some of them had illegal documents, the displaced also face many traumas and different forms of discrimination in some areas (Cavanaugh, 2016).

The different human rights violations the IDPs experienced throughout their displacement varied based on the site's local policy, administrative structure, and armed group activity. Many of the displaced and returned people who have experienced traumatic events required services in the areas of psychological support, and social services, but these services are frequently lacking. The interviewees believe that relocating to a new place after years of occupation will be also a cultural shock for them. Having the fear of occasional attacks or the possibility of war restarting will cause psychological issues, such as constant anxiety (*from personal communication with IDPs from Karabakh, April 1, 2023*). It has been recommended that IDPs would require programs in terms of prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder to peacefully settle down and have closure with their traumatic memories and continue their lives in a stable quality (Jafer et al., 2022).

The necessity to create numerous social programs for them reflected it. Regarding childhood, we discover that the situation of the displaced children in Azerbaijan is in the saddest state a generation that is suffering from the trauma of violence. As incubators for extremism, and violence due to the occupation's terror, as well as socialization processes

and school programs to which children and youth are subjected, we find that sociological effects get worse among the most vulnerable people in general and children in particular, which will erode the social fabric. For children to resume living normally, it is necessary to transport them to safe locations and provide them with psychological rehabilitation. Many of the children who have been forced to flee their homes have lost their family members and caregivers in the conflict, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Others had to work to support their families without receiving an education, which deprives the children of opportunities to earn money in the future and causes social exclusion, learning disparities, and later difficulties in fulfilling their civic duties as citizens of Azerbaijan (UNHCR, 2018).

With the liberation of Karabakh, they had the relief as no longer they would be considered as IDPs and be discriminated against by others. Now they finally got the closure and happiness of realizing that the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are finally liberated. Besides, it is a proud moment for married members of the interview participants to take their children to the homeland they grew up and tell the stories and share good memories they had in Karabakh growing up. Being an IDP and not feeling belong to a big city created challenges and harmed their self-confidence during the years. Although they are not finally considered IDP however by moving back to Karabakh they have to restart building their social identity as there is fear of not belonging to Karabakh after years of living in the capital and sustaining life over there (*from personal communication with IDPs from Fuzuli, Zangilan, Aghdam, Kalbajar April 1, 2023*).

2.4 Lack of Trust of IDPs in the “Great Return” Program

The “Great Return” program has created a certain level of expectations for IDPs based on the ongoing projects to rebuild the Karabakh region and relocate citizens to their hometowns.

Hence, while establishing infrastructure is one part of the duty, another is about ensuring that there are enough job places which will help IDPs to sustain their life, as for the last 30 years, these people have already built their life conditions (home, education, medical support, work) and expect the same opportunities in liberated areas as well. Rural areas tend to lag behind urban areas in terms of education, healthcare, transportation, etc. while shoring up the sustainable natural resource management (Guire, 2022). Therefore, the major focus and importance of the project are to assure that the government fulfills its task of returning people to Karabakh and sustaining necessary life conditions which is an integral part of the “Great Return” framework. If these expectations of IDPs are not met, they are likely to go back to Baku and other cities as they would not have the trust and motivation to stay in Karabakh. Failure of the government to properly enforce the task of sustaining necessary life conditions may lead to the loss of millions of investments. As the money spent on rebuilding infrastructure in Karabakh was provided by the government budget which means that the wrong allocation and distribution of this budget ultimately affects the Azerbaijani economy as a whole. Thus, it would be a waste of time and resources for the government, IDPs who left their houses in Baku and other cities, and in general, all stakeholders who have been contributing to the program of “Great Return”. A lack of trust in the government from a citizen's perspective would be harmed as people left the life conditions, they have been creating for the last 30 years.

They are willing to move back and live-in liberated areas, they are not planning to settle down and built their lives permanently (*from personal communication with IDPs from Karabakh, April 1, 2023*).

The excitement of liberation and the chance to see those lands still do not surpass the stability IDPs have in the capital. As mentioned by interviewees, some of them recently were able to purchase an apartment and move in them after years of struggle with housing, rentals, adaption to the big city, and finding jobs. Besides, some members of the focus group moved here when they were a kid, that's why they have less association with Karabakh and have all their friends and family members in Baku. It is challenging for IDPs to let go of everything they have worked for and leave back their friends, colleagues, and routines they had in Baku. Their proposal to consider relocation was to create a replica of Baku in Karabakh so it could provide opportunities for employment as well as leisure activities, and educational and healthcare services equipped with modern technology. Another point was to keep their lives in Baku but move there during summer and winter holidays to get a sense of belonging to the liberated lands and built new communities over there for permanent resettlement (*from personal communication with IDPs from Karabakh, April 1, 2023*).

To sum up, this chapter is focused on identifying the problem of the research study and having an in-depth analysis of related parts of it. The concerns of IDPs to relocate back to liberated Karabakh are analyzed through the existing literature and based on the results of focus group interviews. The chapter highlights that IDPs have several concerns related to relocation. Regarding safety issues, firstly the Azerbaijan government has a lack of mine maps and also military attacks ongoing by Armenian remnants in Azerbaijan's liberated lands which prevent IDPs not only from moving to their land permanently but also make

obstacles to seeing and visiting their homelands even once a year. Secondly, IDPs are concerned about newly built modern apartments and infrastructure. They consider that new apartments and infrastructure cannot replace the memories of their houses. Lastly, the crucial issues that need to be considered for the successful development of the “Great Return” program are psychological trauma in the aftermath of the conflict and the lack of trust of IDPs in the “Great Return” program.

Chapter 3. Policy alternatives

Following Chapter 2 and clearly understanding the essential deficiencies shown over, we have generated four alternative options that we believe might solve many of the Urban-rural Migration challenges. All three alternative options are separately expected to have a huge impact on challenges, yet, applying all three of them simultaneously is going to be the most effective way to overcome all the challenges in front of the "Great Return" to the newly liberated Karabakh. Consequently, our policy alternatives are suggested as aligned at the bottom: Khankendi Reclamation and the Pathway to Sustainable Peace, Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku, Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs during, and lastly, Creation of economic incentives and assistance programs for IDPs during urban-rural migration that can help to address the challenges associated with urban-rural migration.

3.1 Returning Khankendi and negotiating a final peace agreement with Armenia

After the victorious 44-day Patriotic War Azerbaijan liberated Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Zangilan, and Gubadli, the city of Shusha, and put an end to the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia. Finally, after almost 30 years long occupation, Internally Displaced Persons of Azerbaijan would be able to return to their homes. Nevertheless, there are certain challenges with urban-rural migration, as mentioned before, one of them being security. Internally Displaced Persons that participated in the semi-structured focused group interviews stressed security challenges as one of the main reasons for being ambivalent about returning to liberated lands. The fact that there are still Armenian armed forces, the city of Khankendi is de-facto under the rule of Armenian separatists, and the presence of Russian Peacekeepers are potential factors creating fear in the minds of Internally Displaced Persons. In addition, even though a ceasefire was declared, skirmishes

continue on the front adding up to the security threats. Furthermore, Armenia left mines all over liberated territories and refused to provide correct maps with mines. Without a doubt, this ends up prolonging the resettlement process.

Four policy alternatives are being proposed to resolve security challenges and speed up the urban-rural migration process to the liberated lands. First of all, it is important to continue a comprehensive mine clearance program. At the same time, resolving the issue of Armenian separatist forces and the so-called “Artsakh government”, as well as taking full control of Khankendi also demands immediate attention. The signing of the peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the withdrawal of the Russian Peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh are last but not least policies to resolve security issues.

Conduction of a comprehensive mine clearance program

Only in Aghdam territory, there were almost 100 thousand mines buried; furthermore, according to the Landmine Monitor Report, it is possible that the total of mined areas in Karabakh can vary from 350 square kilometers up to 830 square kilometers. According to international law, it is Yerevan’s responsibility to hand over mine maps with full accuracy according to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction to restore peace and prosperity in the region. As an answer to the Azerbaijani government’s accusations Armenia provided maps of mined territories; however, the maps proved to be only 25% accurate (Report, 2021)

Currently, Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) is working hard to ensure the safe return of IDPs. The government of Azerbaijan should work closely with the international community and organizations and increase the number of workers for ANAMA (as well as attract experts from other countries, such as International Mine Action

Standards (IMAS)). It is also essential to teach adults and children in schools that are in liberated lands how to interact with and avoid mines. The government has already started this process, but more work should be done, especially with an emphasis on educational activities.

Reclamation of Khankendi and elimination of “Artsakh government”

As Azerbaijani MP Tahir Karimli said (2022), “We must ensure control over Khankendi”. This is a vital point in securing the sovereignty of the Republic and ensuring the security of its lands. Armenia still supports the separatist “Artsakh government” with their “leaders” residing in Khankendi. Additionally, there are many instances of attacks by Armenian troops violating the agreement of November 10, 2020, signed by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia that put an end to the Second Karabakh War. Despite the agreement, Armenia used the Lachin-Khankendi road to support illegal troops residing in Khankendi and nearby areas. Therefore, Azerbaijan took control over the Allahgulular and Zamanpeyesi regions of the Shusha and created a checkpoint Lachin-Khankendi road. (apa.az, 26) One of the options would be to negotiate with the government of Armenia to eliminate separatist troops. It is also possible to take Khankendi by force. However, it is recommended to take control over all major areas that are important to get full advantage of transportation and aerial surveillance. Controlling all the roads and eliminating the possibility of troops freely moving on the liberated lands and restricting the support of separatist troops could be a better option. This blockade could be also in the form of checkpoint areas like the one on the Lachin-Khankendi road. People of Khankendi should realize that it is better to get an Azerbaijani passport with all the benefits that Azerbaijan will provide them rather than stay in one city with limited opportunities. Promotion of tax breaks or other financial benefits, launching a comprehensive information campaign stressing the benefits of obtaining

Azerbaijani citizenship, and ensuring the protection of Armenians living in Khankendi are important tools for using soft power.

The two policies proposed regarding the security issues above play a major role in facilitating successful migration to Karabakh for Internally Displaced Persons. Internally Displaced Persons mentioned several times during the interview that they are mostly afraid of the presence of landmines and Armenian troops in the Karabakh region. Many are unwilling to return mainly due to these reasons. Landmines were hidden under ground by Armenians during the years of occupation and they are still not removed completely; thus, these mines may cause severe injuries and even result in deaths. People wondering in newly migrated territories, especially children may end up stepping on mines and losing limbs or even dying. Only the conduction of a comprehensive mine clearance program can guarantee the safety of the lives of IDPs. At the same time, the presence of Armenian troops increases security threats for the people that will be living in Karabakh. Armenian troops might attack, and cause violence and clashes if they remain in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan. Incidents like these can negatively impact the safety and well-being of the local population, causing fear and instability. IDPs that still bear the trauma of attacks in the First Karabakh War should be fully confident that there will be no further attacks and that they can leave in peace.

Achieving a final peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia

All of the above-mentioned are extremely hard to achieve without a peace treaty between the two countries. Peace treaties are essential to pave the road toward long-lasting peace and prosperity. There are many instances in history where two conflicting countries were able to overcome obstacles and live in peace side by side. One of the famous examples of a treaty that successfully ended a conflict was a treaty between Egypt and Israel signed in

1978 in Washington, DC. It was the first treaty signed by Israel and an Arab neighbor, after the brutal Arab-Israeli War. This is just one of the examples of a treaty formulating a pathway to sustainable peace. (Taylor, 2015)

In addition to an exemplary achievement of peace between Egypt and Israel, it is worth mentioning the Belfast Agreement, also known as “The Good Friday Agreement”. A dispute between unionists and nationalists regarding Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom. As a result of the Agreement signed in 1998, a compromise was achieved, and it was agreed that. "People born in Northern Ireland can have British or Irish nationality or both," and "Northern Ireland is part of the UK, and this can change only through a referendum" (BBC News, 2023).

Peace treaties would be legally binding and enforceable and would decrease the probability of armed conflicts in the future. It would help to resolve territorial disputes on both sides. Nevertheless, both sides would have to make sacrifices and find a compromise to end the conflict. It can take several years, even after signing a peace agreement, for two nations to accept each other and work together. However, the most vital result of the peace agreement is that Azerbaijani IDPs can be assured of safety and trust in the future of peace. Peace agreements can also open a door for cooperation in trade and economic-related programs. Armenia must realize that it is beneficial economically and politically to work with Azerbaijan.

Withdrawal of the Russian Peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh

Unquestionably, a peace treaty would have to address the concerns and interests of regional and international stakeholders, mainly Russia. Russian Peacekeeper Contingent fails to fulfill its mission and be an objective “peacekeeper”. Armenian separatist forces and the

people of Khankendi rely on Russian troops based on a shared religion and similarity in culture.

Apart from Karabakh, Russian Peacekeepers are also present in the Middle East and Moldova. Russian Peacekeepers have had issues with being impartial and objective. Buø (2001), on the other hand, concluded that “conflicts on former Soviet territories following the dissolution of the Soviet Union have led to a number of operations that the Russians define as peacekeeping operations.”. It seems, however, that in the majority of these conflicts, Russia supported one party initially, and so emerged as an ‘impartial’ peacekeeper. It is a pattern traceable in all Russian peacekeeping operations, from South Ossetia to involvement in the former Yugoslavia, where the Russians are considered more or less pro-Serbian, but act, however, at the same time as supposedly ‘impartial’ international peacekeepers” (p.82).

Russian peacekeepers also operated in Georgia to track the implementation of the Moscow Agreement. According to Ketevan Murusidze (2020) “the mission was highly criticized for its failure to ensure the safe return of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). For instance, in 1995 about 200 ethnic Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) were arrested for trying to return home and over 20 were killed. Out of at least 300 000 IDPs, around 47 000 were permitted back to the Abkhaz-controlled territory” and “Moscow effectively avoided its role as a peacekeeper responsible for addressing diverging issues and creating conditions for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.”

Notwithstanding Armenian expectations, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: “Russian peacekeepers are temporarily stationed there, the statement of November 10, 2020, states their term, and they will still face tragedy if Armenians count on someone,”. (report.az, 2022) It is important halting the presence of peacekeepers by informing two-party states 6 months before the 5-year term. This is a very delicate matter;

even though Russia is busy with the ongoing war in Ukraine, it still has a geopolitical interest in the region. If it would be possible to reach a peace agreement with Armenia before 2025, then the Russian Federation would have to remove its troops. As an alternative, Russia might keep personnel in a monitoring center and the Armenian border. Allowing Russia to be a mediator of a peace treaty, as well as for the three countries to participate in economically important projects together would help to resolve this issue on a soft note.

3.2. Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku

The urban central system is attempting to concentrate on more individuals who are interested in working, pursuing education, and having fun in appropriate locales. All of this contributes to urban overpopulation around some big cities. Baku, like many other cities, which serves as the hub for the integration of businesses, schools, retail establishments, and other structures, needs urban decentralization. More educational institutions in Baku than in any other city in Azerbaijan give students a variety of majors and career options. This means that students are moving to Baku as their priority to have a brighter future, more alternatives for academic majors, and more possibilities for their academic lives. More than 159,000 students annually move to the capital from other cities, according to research and conclusions (Azstat, 2022), to have better opportunities in the educational area. It has been determined that Baku is the best location for employees in terms of employment and career options. However, that is not the only example of excessive urbanization. According to the data (Bakı şəhər statistika idarəsi. Demografik göstəricilər, 2022). Baku has a greater employment rate than other cities in Azerbaijan. This policy choice demonstrated urban centralization, which is, as stated, the concentration of all institutions of higher learning, workplaces, places of employment, and shopping malls in the capital city as opposed to their dispersal to other cities.

It is required to decide to expand the city due to its dense population density and all the subsequent effects related to the enormous strain on the social and transportation infrastructure. In other words, polycentrism, a concept that has started to be applied rather often in numerous other major cities, is taking the role of centralization (Zeljic, 2019). Some areas of Azerbaijan, in this case, the newly liberated Karabakh region, can use the city's polycentric model. The use of these prospects will provide a "Great Return" so easily and also help to solve the capital city's decentralization issue as the area is intended to be rebuilt and a smart city model created. Without having to relocate to the capital, inhabitants of the nearby areas may have the opportunity to receive a quality education and improve their social lives through the establishment of educational facilities and entertainment venues in this area. The urban-rural migration rate towards the Absheron region where the capital city is located is expected to decrease and on the contrary people from Baku will move Karabakh region as economic and infrastructural conditions are getting better. The establishment of efficient investment strategies, economic specialization, and adaptable regional management will all be made possible by the emergence of a new economic area in Azerbaijan. This alternative to the current policy will give the 44-Day War-liberated areas a boost in terms of development and restoration. Therefore, the "Great Return" to the liberated territories can be seen as an important step toward anticipated new economic opportunities. It is also crucial for the reintegration of the liberated areas into the Azerbaijani economy as a whole which calls for improved economic management, better planning for the growth of economic regions, and revisions to the Karabakh region's organizational structure.

A sustainable transportation infrastructure is also required for the freed areas to realize their economic potential. Consequently, building a robust transportation infrastructure is one of the main focuses of the restoration program for the liberated territories. It is crucial

to start building airports as well as developing and repairing the local train and highway networks in free areas. A few of the roadways are already in use, however, the effortless connection from Baku to Karabakh eases the population movement. These routes will make it possible to enter Karabakh from the north, east, and south, making it the region's transportation hub.

All of the aforementioned schemes call for the reconstruction of Karabakh as a brand-new, prosperous area in a few years. It will make it possible for Azerbaijan to completely incorporate the economy of Karabakh into its own and to use its economic potential in the coming years. It will also benefit the growth of Azerbaijan's non-oil economy because the freed regions have significant potential in industries like agriculture and energy. By completing these projects, the region's transportation and commercial hubs will also be reached by Azerbaijan and Karabakh.

Ours is a time of increased regional connectedness, liberalization of the economy, sociocultural integration, and political humanism. In this sense, the massive socioeconomic growth of the recently liberated regions of Karabakh would act as a "stimulator" for the economy of all the neighboring nations. It would serve as a "launching pad" for the future development of trilateral and bilateral socioeconomic relationships that benefit each other as well as geopolitical strategic connections. In this regard, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Turkey have already started working toward the creation of a Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) that would benefit all three nations (Azertag, 2021)

The decentralization strategy used in Europe

The idea of a polycentric city suggests a positive course for the expansion and development of cities, not just a trend. Decentralization of economic and social activity is becoming more popular throughout Europe, as shown in the seven megacities that make up the urban

development project: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Paris, and Vienna (Criekingen, Bachman, Guisset, & Lennert, 2007). Barcelona, for instance, recognized the value of decentralizing and monumentalizing the suburbs, providing them with central prominence, even in the 1980s during the preparations for the Olympic Games in 1992 (Díaz-Lanchas, 2021). The goal of monumentalization is to elevate the standard of public areas. To enhance these locations, which later on became crossing sites in the city's urban structure, a plan was created for their renovation (Rosa, 2022). Suburbs, which are places with a lesser quality of life, arise in this phase if the city grows first around its core before starting to grow. The city's center is where all of the services, employment, and other places of interest are located. On a certain magnitude, such a network of interdependent linkages destabilizes and disintegrates. According to global experience and the findings of our study, when the integrated development of regions outside the capital is carried out, i.e., the establishment of educational institutions and the chance of getting the same educational opportunities that are available in the capital city, in the instance of Baku, places of employment and services for the populace, will draw more residents, entrepreneurs, employers, and students to stay in those areas from which they moved to the capital.

3.3. Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs

To ensure that IDPs can come back, the government must provide legal aid to citizens. This legal aid should be free, and archives can be used to ensure transparency and accuracy. Effectively resolving issues relating to housing, land, and property rights is integral to fostering durable solutions (Adeola & Orchard, 2020)

According to the United States Institute of Peace (United States Institute of Peace, 2021), “Without a male head of the household, female heads of households or parentless children often run into obstacles upon return. In the case of divorce, abandonment, or death of the male, women or children often hold no formal claim to the property.” Therefore, it is crucial to also recognize traditional claims and help IDPs that might have further legal problems. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand that many IDPs have a traumatic experience with war and being displaced, many lost family members, homes, and jobs. According to the (WorldBank, 2017). “In still other cases, the memory of traumatic events in home areas precludes return; demographic realities have changed; shelter is unavailable or lost; or scarce resources or competing claims to land or livelihood assets make return untenable.” People might find it challenging to start living in rural areas, they might feel lonely and depressed. To help people with anxiety issues and traumatic experiences migrate back to the Karabakh region it is possible to provide psychological support services to displaced persons in the liberated territories. Awareness-raising can be conducted to inform displaced persons and their families about the mental health and psychological support services available. It can be helpful to create social networks to alleviate the sense of seclusion. (Stubbs & Soroya, 1996)

People from the same region and villages can hold social events to increase networking and decrease the sense of isolation before migrating to liberated lands.

Azerbaijan can create an organization similar to ALIMA (The Alliance for International Medical Action) that provides psychological and legal support for civilians that were affected by violence and war. ALIMA has been working with displaced persons since 2012 and has experience in providing legal and mental health support. In an interview, Dodo Llunga Diemu who is a mental health coordinator at ALIMA, talks about the success stories of people whom ALIMA helped. (Diemu, 2021). Additionally, similar legal and mental health support initiatives are provided in Ukraine by the non-governmental organization “Time to Gather Ukrainians”. Moreover, the recent case of Mykola, a resident of a compact settlement of IDPs, who was assisted in obtaining a second extract about the place of permanent registration, as well as was supported with subsequent legal and social affairs, demonstrates that it is necessary to provide social and legal support to IDPs returning home. (Network, n.d.) These actions can make the process of urban-rural migration smoother and more accessible.

3.4. Creation of Economic Incentives to Build Trust in the “Great Return” Program

To resolve the social challenges, such as the lack of incentives for migration and psychological trauma mentioned above, it is important to create social cohesion for IDPs. The young generation that has not seen liberated lands does not have a connection with their historic homeland. Launching media campaigns promoting the beauty of Karabakh and nearby areas, holding different cultural events, and creating job opportunities with higher salaries by targeting the younger generation would be one policy alternative. Young people would be willing to forge a life in the capital if they had better financial opportunities in their homeland. This idea is similar to the model developed by Sjaastad (1962) which states that “people will migrate when the benefits outweigh the costs.

Benefits of migration are defined as the present value of potential income gains resulting from the difference in income between origins and destination” (Rhoda, 1983).

Moreover, it is worth considering the experience of other nations, such as the Republic of Korea. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Korea has published information about actions that the government is taking to promote urban-rural migration. (The Ministry of Agriculture, n.d.) For example, the government publishes booklets to promote migration, offers special programs and activities to create an immersive experience of rural living, and holds training teaching basic skills in agriculture. Additionally, the Korean government provides loans with low-interest rates, as well as partially finances startups related to agriculture and rural living. The Azerbaijani government can cooperate with the Republic of Korea and implement similar strategies to promote rural-urban migration of Internally Displaced Persons.

It would be also effective to open either new universities or new campuses of already existing universities in liberated lands to attract young people; IDP students would also have certain financial benefits while studying in the reoccupied lands of Azerbaijan. Opening museums and cultural centers to preserve historical and cultural heritage could also help restore the sense of belonging to IDPs.

In conclusion, to resolve the social challenges faced by IDPs it is essential to implement the policies mentioned above, such as opening university campuses in the Karabakh region, to promote integration and economic benefits for IDPs. By creating a model based on Sjaastad's theory, it would be possible to attract more people into the region and create incentives for them to stay and rebuild their lives. Moreover, it is necessary to adapt policies by cooperating with the Republic of Korea which has an experience in the urban-rural migration process. By implementing these policies Azerbaijan can successfully integrate Internally Displaced Persons and resettle liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

Chapter 4. Evaluation of policy alternatives

As a continuation of Chapter 3, each policy alternative will be discussed and assessed in this part using five criteria, which range from efficiency, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, and feasibility. This capstone project will examine the benefits and drawbacks of the available policy alternatives to these criteria and identify the best solution.

4.1. Returning Khankendi and negotiating a final peace agreement with Armenia

To create proper conditions for the return of IDPs, firstly, security issues must be solved. A comprehensive mine clearance program is an ongoing and effective policy as it will ensure that IDPs can return and live in safety in Karabakh. However, to ensure that all the mines are cleared ANAMA has to increase the number of workers, the government must spend more money to attract professionals, as well as use the experience of international organizations. Therefore, this option is not very efficient. However, it is highly feasible, and ANAMA has already begun mine clearance in the liberated territories. The flexibility of the program will be based on the future success of negotiations between the two countries and the progress of ANAMA. Also, the fact that only 25% of maps that show the location of mined areas proved to be accurate highlights the need for a comprehensive database of mined areas.

The reclamation of Khankendi is highly effective because it will help ensure that the sovereignty and people of Azerbaijan are protected and secured. To achieve this goal efficiently it is preferable to control the roads and restrict the support of separatist troops. Taking Khankendi by force is unreasonable at this point and inefficient. This policy might also depend on the progress of negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Providing

tax breaks and other financial benefits, such as subsidies for businesses and helping rebuild the infrastructure would be considered a successful usage of soft power. The use of soft power and military power at the same time can ensure the protection of sovereignty and eliminate potential security challenges in the future.

The third alternative of signing a peace treaty can be a significant point in the new dynamic of the relationship between the two countries. The formulation of a peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia is highly effective as it will finally pave the road to security and peace in the region. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan must be prepared to make compromises and spend a long time preparing a draft version of the treaty. To formulate a peace treaty, Azerbaijan must work with different geopolitical actors, as it is not solely dependent on Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, it is feasible and certain steps have already been taken by both sides.

Withdrawal of the Russian Peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh will ensure the stabilization of the region and ensure the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan as well. No other party shall influence or arbitrate the decisions of Azerbaijan on its own internationally recognized territories. Azerbaijan must have to inform both sides 6 months before the end of the contract and theoretically, it is feasible based on the November 10th agreement. However, it is a delicate matter, and must require time and patience; thus, should be handled carefully. It is also a flexible alternative because it will depend on geopolitical interests and the reaction of the Russian Federation. This policy acknowledges the complexity of the situation and suggests a more diplomatic and delicate approach to resolving it.

4.2 Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku

By weighing the benefits and drawbacks of available policy solutions, this division's core would help choose the most practical option for Investigating the Prospects and Challenges of Urban-Rural Migration. Decentralization of Baku, which lessens people's reliance on Baku, is one of the solutions that may be used to address the challenges of urban-rural migration. By making the Karabakh region more developed, reliable, and attractive, decentralization can be seen as an effective factor in reducing overpopulation in the Absheron region and closing the gap among regions over time, according to the effectiveness criteria for this policy option. Even though these long-term advantages do not translate urban transformation into decentralized urbanization initiatives, they do translate them into actions that aid it and provide useful outcomes.

Additionally, this policy choice meets equity standards. The question of social sustainability must be taken into account while discussing urban population density. This may be interpreted as offering job possibilities and a standard of living based on equality so that citizens of different areas, both affluent and poor, can acquire reasonable jobs and housing in their regions and live in a respectable level of comfort.

It should be mentioned that the effectiveness of this choice depends on making sure that all of society's members feel like they have a role in its growth and advancement and are not feeling detached from society's main activities. This demands that all people and groups have the chance to increase or maintain their level of comfort in their local communities. According to the results of our study, it would be fair to provide favorable conditions in the provinces so that those who were forced to live in Baku could go back there and maintain their lives in the same circumstances they had in the city.

Several nations have also adopted decentralization measures, demonstrating the viability of this concept. The decentralization approach in the urbanization strategy is predicated on

the idea that people would be evenly dispersed across the nation as opposed to being focused in one or a few major cities. The encouragement of industrial growth in villages, towns, and cities, avoiding the possibility of the establishment of new industrial enterprises in large cities, and even the relocation of the ones that have already been established away from the centers of cities are all examples of decentralist urbanization efforts. Plans for decentralized urbanization have been put into practice in the UK, China, France, and India. Finally, even if decentralization is a lengthy process, this approach offers the flexibility to be improved upon or altered to achieve better results. for attaining greater outcomes. To properly execute the initiative, examples from other European nations may also be analyzed and included.

4.3. Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs

Providing legal help and consultations would effectively solve the problem that IDPs had with documentation after the First Karabakh War. These policies are feasible because there are already trained lawyers and mental health facility workers that can provide the needed help to Internally Displaced Persons. Rendering legal assistance and psychological support to individuals in need is also efficient and can be implemented. As it was stated in a previous chapter, these problems are one of the main challenges that need to be solved for IDP to successfully migrate from Baku to the liberated lands. The provision of free psychological support services in the liberated areas, at least for a limited period until people fully assimilate, is highly feasible. Additionally, these programs can ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their traumas and problems.

4.4. Creation of economic incentives to build trust in the “Great Return” Program

The creation of economic incentives for urban-rural migration would help to reach the goal of increasing the sense of belonging and create additional incentives for IDPs to return to their homeland. Providing higher salaries and opening new universities can create a burden on the economy, however in the long run it will prove to be necessary. Therefore, as these options require more time and money, they are more challenging to accomplish. These policies are also flexible because they will be based on the needs of IDPs. Depending on the demand for labor the government of Azerbaijan can increase or decrease the number of jobs in the region.

Helping to connect Internally Displaced Persons with their land via organizing different cultural events, opening museums, and doing social media activities to engage IDPs is a solid alternative because it would help people coming back to their homes create a sense of pride and belonging. As the future of Azerbaijan, and liberated lands especially, is in the hands of the future generations it is crucial to create all the necessary conditions for younger people. The next policy of new universities and campuses is equally important. The implementation of this is also manageable, even though it would take a couple of years with building an infrastructure on the geographical look and aesthetic of cities. Additionally, the government can provide special scholarships and reduced fees to attract students from all over the country to study at the newly established universities. Additionally, the government can provide special scholarships and reduced fees to attract students from all over the country to study at the newly established universities. These policy alternatives are also stated in the "I State Program on the Great Return to Territories Liberated from Occupation of the Republic of Azerbaijan", the goal of which is to economically revive the region and make them self-sufficient.

Policy Criteria	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Feasibility	Flexibility	Equity
Khankendi Reclamation and the Pathway to Sustainable Peace	+	+	+	-	-
Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku	+	+	+	+	+
Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs during	+	+	+	+	-

Creation of economic incentives to build trust in the “Great Return” Program	+	+	+	+	+
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All in all, 4 policy alternatives were proposed and later evaluated in this chapter based on efficiency, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, and feasibility criteria. All proposed alternatives are manageable and might lead to positive results to serve the benefits of Internally Displaced Persons of Azerbaijan. Only the policy of the Khankendi Reclamation and the withdrawal of Russian Peacekeepers from the region might be considered relatively challenging. Nevertheless, if acted carefully and diplomatically these policies might prove to be extremely successful and feasible in the long run.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Aim of study

The goal of this capstone project was to analyze potential challenges that the government can face during the process of the "Great Return to Karabakh" and provide potential solutions to them ensure the safe return of Internally Displaced Persons from the capital city to their historic homeland. Security, economic, infrastructure, and social challenges were discovered, and policy alternatives were proposed to tackle them. Below, based on the evaluation of proposed policy alternatives, recommendations on policies will be provided to help summarize the paper and pinpoint the crucial parts.

As mentioned above, IDPs should be confident that they can feel safe and secure and will avoid any tragic accidents related to mines. Thus, comprehensive mine clearance is one of the best solutions to ensure the safe return and further residence of Internally Displaced Persons. Additionally, educational programs and activities aimed at the population also proved to be instrumental in other countries; it is also advised by International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). It is a preventive measure, and it could potentially save the life of people living in Karabakh and nearby regions.

The policy of taking over Khankendi would be problematic and could potentially lead to another armed conflict in the region. Therefore, taking control over all the important military areas and roads that surround Khankendi is a better option. It would help prevent any unexpected attack and protect the territorial security of Azerbaijan and other regions in Karabakh.

Ending territorial disputes can help in the future build economic and trade relationships which can positively affect both countries. It is the by far the best option to leave behind

the war and try to eventually work together. As mentioned before, a peace treaty can bring prosperity to a region and stabilize the relationship between various players. There are certain steps taken towards achieving this goal and Armenia should use this opportunity fully. It is important to keep in mind that Russian Federation is still a major player in the region, and it would be dangerous to ignore this fact. It is necessary to first reach a peace agreement to remove Russian military forces from the region.

Resolving social challenges is equally crucial because they will directly affect the living conditions of Internally Displaced Persons in the liberated territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Policies, such as opening university campuses and providing conditions with higher salaries and tax breaks will, without a doubt, work as great incentives in the process of urban-rural migration. These policies will help reduce the disparity between the capital city and regions, as well as economically revive the liberated territories. It is also important to care about the mental health and legal problems that refugees might face and assist them in the best possible way. These policies that relate to security and social challenges highlight the importance of ensuring high-quality life for IDPs and total safety. If successfully implemented, they might attract citizens of other regions and foreigners, and the country more prosperous and economically strong.

Developing a liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku is a further option. All of these possibilities have a chance of becoming a reality and would enhance the "Great Return" to Azerbaijan's freed areas. Instead of security policy options, decentralization of Baku is judged to be more expensive than the alternatives; yet both are understood to be effective in terms of the difficulties associated with urban-rural migration.

In conclusion, it has been shown that the Karabakh area would significantly balance if the offered policy alternatives were implemented in accordance with reality in terms of the Great Return to freed regions and the issues with urban-rural migration. By doing this,

people would be less inclined to choose to relocate to the capital city or its surrounding areas and more inclined to choose the Karabakh region as a newly emerging business and economic hub, which would cause the rate of urbanization to slow down over the following decades and enable the entire economy of Azerbaijan to advance and progress in the later approaching future. To avert the issues of excessive urban-rural migration in Azerbaijan following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, this article and the written data are regarded as being necessary to address and find these alternatives vital.

Recommendations

Based on an examination of global practice about the "Great Return" to freed areas: Investigating the Prospects and issues of Urban-Rural Migration, the following recommendations should be put into practice to address the issues described above for the "Great Return" to the Karabakh area of Azerbaijan:

1. *Khankendi Reclamation and the Pathway to Sustainable Peace* - Carrying out a thorough mine-clearing effort to ensure the IDPs' safe return. The Azerbaijani government must work closely with international organizations and communities and increase the number of ANAMA employees. It is also essential to teach adults and children how to interact with and avoid mines.

Khankendi's restoration and the overthrow of the "Artsakh government" Controlling all roads, preventing forces from moving freely on the liberated land, and limiting the support provided by separatist soldiers are needed. A checkpoint area like the one on the Lachin-Khankendi route has to serve as a barrier. Promoting tax incentives or other financial benefits, initiating a detailed information campaign that highlights the benefits of becoming an Azerbaijani citizen, and protecting the

safety of Armenian residents in Khankendi are all significant weapons for wielding soft power.

Achieving a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to avoid Military conflict. Resolving territorial conflicts on both sides. Understanding the financial and commercial advantages of working together.

Demand Russian peacekeeping contingent leaves Karabakh to achieve real peace.

2. *Developing liberated region by dispersing centralized Baku* - To move such centers to Karabakh in order to create a new economic area in Azerbaijan and to construct effective investment strategies, economic specialization, and flexible regional administration within the newly freed territory. Reintegrate the freed regions into the Azerbaijani economy as a whole, which necessitates improved economic management, better planning for the development of economic regions, and organizational changes for the Karabakh region. The liberated territories must also have a sustainable transportation infrastructure in order to reach their full economic potential. Create a strong transportation infrastructure. Start creating local train and highway networks, as well as building airports, in undeveloped areas.
3. *Rendering legal assistance and psychological support programs for IDPs during* - For IDPs who have returned, the government must offer both legal and psychological help. Encouraging the creation of social networks to alleviate the sense of seclusion and people from the same region and villages holding social events to increase networking and decrease the sense of isolation before migrating to liberated lands.
4. *Creation of economic incentives and assistance programs for IDPs during urban-rural migration* - Providing work prospects with higher incomes by focusing on the younger population, hosting various cultural events, and launching media

campaigns to highlight the beauty of Karabakh and the surrounding areas. If there were greater job prospects back home, young people might be more likely to settle down in the capital. Opening museums and cultural institutions to preserve historical and cultural legacy may also aid in giving IDPs a renewed sense of identity. Lastly, collaborating with the Republic of Korea and putting comparable plans into practice to encourage IDP movement from rural to urban areas.

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