

## Rural Women in Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping Process: Azerbaijani Rural Women's Perspectives on Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

*Barış İnşası ve Koruma Sürecinde Kırsal Kadınlar: Azerbaycan'lı Kırsal Kadınların Dağlık Karabağ Sorununa Bakış Açıları*

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### Highlights:

- The Karabakh conflict has harmed women mentally, economically, and socially and women do not support the war.
- This war has exacerbated gender inequality; women peacebuilders are not recognized by the public.
- This study is crucial because of highlighting conflict-affected women's challenges and what should be done from a female perspective.

**Abstract:** Women are undoubtedly among those who have been most adversely influenced by the Karabakh war and the lack of a formal evaluation of the situation regarding women who are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict in the area remains an inadequacy. It is crucial to highlight the challenges faced by conflict-affected women and what should be done from a female perspective. The major goal is to comprehend the Karabakh conflict from the perspectives of women who have experienced it by looking through the effects of the wars between 1988-1994 and 2016–2021. This study also aims to discover how rural women feel about the conflict and its resolution. In order to achieve a sustainable peace, women's views must be heard and understanding the viewpoints of women is crucial to prepare populations for peace. By documenting these perspectives, I will demonstrate how the local and central governments should pay attention to the opinions of the rural women affected by the conflict. **Methodology:** In the study, theoretical information was given with an overview of the history of the Karabakh Conflict, and in the implementation part, in-depth interviews, which is a technique of qualitative research method, were conducted with 10 rural women who witnessed the war directly or indirectly. **Findings:** As a result, the Karabakh conflict has had a huge negative impact on women's lives, mentally, economically, and socially. The country's long history of war has left the role of women in society as "housewives" and deepened gender inequality. At the same time, the deficiency of recognition of women peacekeepers in society indicates that there are few or no women working in this field or perhaps they refrain from working openly due to the fear of being lynched in society. Women do not want war anymore and the conflict to end peacefully due to the failure to sign a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan shows that the threat has not yet completely subsided. In particular, the daily coverage of ceasefire violations in the media creates fear in society and enables to the formation of an impression that "there is a threat of war at any moment."

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**Öne Çıkanlar:**

- Karabağ ihtilafı kadınları psikolojik, ekonomik ve sosyal olarak sarsmıştır ve kadınlar savaşı desteklememektedir.
  - Bu savaş toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğini şiddetlendirmiştir: kadın barış inşacıları toplum tarafından tanınmamaktadır.
  - Bu çalışma, çatışmadan etkilenen kadınların karşılaştığı güçlükleri ve kadın bakış açısıyla yapılması gerekenleri vurgulamak için çok önemlidir.
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**Öz:** Karabağ savaşından en çok etkilenen kesimlerin başında kuşkusuz kadınlar gelmektedir ve bölgedeki çatışmalardan doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak etkilenen kadınların durumunun resmi olarak değerlendirilmemesi bir eksiklik olarak görülmektedir. Çatışmalardan etkilenen kadınların karşılaştığı zorlukları ve kadınların bakış açısıyla yapılması gerekenleri vurgulamak büyük bir önem arz etmektedir. Bu çalışmada 1988-1994 ve 2016-2021 yılları arasındaki savaşların etkilerini incelemekle, savaşı, Karabağ sorununu yaşamış kadınların gözünden anlamak temel amaçtır. Çalışma aynı zamanda kırsal kesimdeki kadınların çatışma ve çözümü hakkında ne hissettiklerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sürdürülebilir bir barışa ulaşmak için kadınların görüşleri dinlenmelidir ve kadınların bakış açılarını anlamak, toplumları barışa hazırlamak için çok önemlidir. Karabağ Sorunu'nun tarihine genel bir bakışla teorik bilgiler verilmiş, uygulama kısmında ise savaşa doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak tanık olmuş 10 kırsal kadınla nitel araştırma yönteminin bir tekniği olan derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmış çalışmada, savaşın kadınların yaşamları üzerinde zihinsel, ekonomik ve sosyal olarak büyük bir olumsuz etkiye sahip olduğu, ülkenin uzun savaş tarihi, kadınların toplumdaki rolünün "ev hanımı" olarak tanımlandığı ve cinsiyet eşitsizliğini derinleştirdiği ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Aynı zamanda, kadın barış güçlerinin toplumda tanınmaması, bu alanda çalışan kadınların çok az olduğunu veya hiç olmadığını veya belki de toplum tarafından linç edilme korkusuyla açıktan çalışmaktan kaçındıklarını göstermektedir. Kadınlar artık savaş istememektedir ve Ermenistan ile Azerbaycan arasında barış anlaşmasının imzalanamaması tehdidin henüz tamamen ortadan kalkmadığını göstermektedir. Özellikle ateşkes ihlallerinin her gün medyada yer alması toplumda korku yaratmakta ve "her an savaş tehdidi var" algısının oluşmasına olanak sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadın Katılımı, Barış İnşası Süreci, Karabağ Sorunu, Azerbaycan.

## **Introduction**

One of the conflicts that have shaken the region the most and negatively affected the level of life in the South Caucasus, where Russia has always been a hotbed of conflict for centuries (Jafarli, 2017), is the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, which started and continues for more than 30 years, between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Nagorno-Karabakh is in the southern Caucasus between Azerbaijan and Armenia which is a landlocked area in Transcaucasia (South Caucasus) located in Karabakh, a geographic area lying between Zangezur and lower Karabakh and covering the Lesser Caucasus mountains. Karabakh is mostly a mountainous region extending from eastern Armenia to Southwestern Azerbaijan. and

covers approximately 4,400 square kilometers, with the entire area located at an average elevation of 1,100 meters above sea level (Misachi, 2021).

Many narratives and interpretations have been created about the Karabakh conflict, which has been going on between Armenia and Azerbaijan for about 28 years, with more than 30 thousand casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees (Foreign Relations Council, 2023). However, most of these discourses approach the events from a political point of view. Undoubtedly, women are among the most affected ones in the Karabakh war because the loss of a breadwinner in the family in patriarchal culture discouraged them from building a career (Abrahamyan et al. 2018). And there is no official assessment of the situation in terms of women who are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict in the region. It is essential to reveal the difficulties of conflict-affected women and what should be done from the perspectives of women. Therefore, the main purpose is to understand the Karabakh conflict from the views of conflict-affected women by the consequences of the wars between 1988-1994 and 2016-2021. Furthermore, this research seeks to explore what rural women think about the conflict and its resolution. Inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding requires the voices of women to be heard and it is important to know the women's perspectives to prepare populations for peace (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019).

So far, the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been conducted by politicians (mainly men), and local communities, especially the women have been excluded from the official peacebuilding process. One of the interviewees mentioned that *«every time when the ministers of Foreign Affairs or the presidents came together, we, rural people were thinking that they would meet and have a great lunch together, then finish and nothing else. The politicians don't care what we want, or we need»*. As one of the most directly affected groups by the Nagorno Karabakh war, most women have hope and desire that all these ends in a peaceful way. Locals are very upset about what happened and may continue to happen at any moment. Especially the ones who lost their relatives or family members in this war are the most affected ones. The fatalities that have taken place and continue to happen are not often framed in the context of the local people's opinions, but only in the political attitudes of the central governments involved, and especially women are excluded from the peacebuilding and peacekeeping process. Since the peace efforts conducted by politicians have failed without any progress, and the armed conflict was renewed on September 27, 2020, it is obvious that the peacebuilding process should continue through including both communities at the grassroots level, especially women of both nations to be involved in the peace process and they must participate actively to find ways for ending this conflict. From this point of view, this research will explore how these rural women see the process, and what they think about peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

This study gives an opportunity to reveal the true thoughts of the women living in the rural area – Barda and how the conflict can be resolved according to them. By documenting these perspectives, I will demonstrate how the local and central governments should pay attention to the opinions of the conflict-affected women.

In the study, theoretical information was given with an overview of the history of the Karabakh Conflict, and in the implementation part, in-depth interviews, which is a technique of qualitative research method, were conducted with 10 rural women who witnessed the war directly or indirectly. In the findings, a general overview has been presented.

### **The Brief History of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

The beginning of the history of the Karabakh conflict coincides with the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917, in the present Nagorno-Karabakh territory, most of the population who considered themselves Armenians settled, they lived as a community in the lands claimed by both states - Azerbaijan and Armenia, under the Armenian name. But when both states lost at the time of the Bolsheviks' violation in 1920, the Karabakh issue remained unresolved. Known as the one who divided the nations, Stalin was given the rule of Azerbaijan when the three major states of the region - Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were re-established as the Soviet Union republics in 1930 (Goltz, 2015).

In 1987, the new chairman of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, defended the claim that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province was taken from the Azerbaijan SSR and given to the Armenian SSR. “The new policy regarding Karabakh was to fuel the fire” (Goltz, 2015).

Although dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, it coincides with the year 1988 that is considered the start of the conflict (Baguirov, 2008), when the conflict became more comprehensive and expanded. According to de Waal, February 1988 is generally accepted as the start date of the modern “Karabakh debate” between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the first violent incidents - violence against the Armenians in the Chardahli village of Azerbaijan and against the Azerbaijanis in the provinces of Mehri and Gafan in the South of Armenia - took place a few months ago, not in Karabakh, but in Armenia and Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2013). Thus, the events began to grow more and more, and the Armenians began to move towards Nagorno-Karabakh. Demands for the unification of Armenia led to the start of the First Karabakh War.

According to Vicken Cheterian, “At the heart of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is the status problem. This is due to the dual identity of this region since the 1920s: for the USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh was both Armenian and Azeri. It was Armenian because the Nagorno-

Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO), a local autonomy as the Soviets understood it, was created because most of the population was ethnic Armenians. Both the Armenian population and the local Armenian party elite of Nagorno-Karabakh were dissatisfied with the arrangement and felt discriminated against. They saw the solution to their problems by leaving Soviet Azerbaijan and joining neighboring Soviet Armenia. Within the logic of the Soviet government, they raised the issue of changing the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. We now know that this led to the death of thousands, the displacement of hundreds of thousands, the destruction of entire communities, and a major confrontation that led to unresolved conflict. After all, it is difficult to imagine the environment in which the Nagorno-Karabakh problem first emerged in 1988” (Cheterian, 2021).

### **Methodology**

Women were arguably among those most affected by the Karabakh War, and the lack of a formal assessment of the situation regarding women directly or indirectly affected by the conflict in the region remains a shortcoming. It is important to clarify the challenges faced by conflict-affected women and what should be done from their perspectives. The main goal is to understand from the perspective of a woman who survived the Karabakh conflict, considering the impact of the 1988-1994 and her 2016-2021 wars. The study also aims to clarify how rural women feel about conflict and its resolution. To achieve an inclusive and lasting peace, women's voices need to be heard, and understanding women's perspectives is essential to prepare people for peace. By documenting these perspectives, it shows how local and central governments should pay attention to the voices of conflict-affected rural women.

Although some studies have been conducted on the effects of the Karabakh war, most of the researches approach the event from a general point of view. In addition, it is considered that there is a limited amount of studies on the Karabakh conflict that lasted more than thirty years.

Therefore, this research examines the problems experienced by women who live close to the frontline and directly experience the effects of the war. It is important to understand the feelings of women who suffer from irreversible pain. Furthermore, it is seen as an important aim of the research that it helps to evaluate the Karabakh conflict in a wider framework by shedding light on the studies planned to be done in the future.

The research population consists of the Barda district, which is very close to the frontline. The sample consists of 10 women who were personally affected by both Karabakh wars. Due to the number of participants included in the study and certain limitations, it is not possible to generalize the study to cover the whole district. However, it is considered important in terms of being an important preliminary source for future research and providing a source for the literature.

The method used in the research is in-depth interviews, which is a technique of qualitative research method, which were conducted with 10 rural women aged over 32 who witnessed the war directly or indirectly from different villages of Barda. Taking the socio-economic status of the women involved in the interview have been living in rural areas with their families and two of them are uneducated, the rest are educated and working as a nurse and teachers. The income level of interviewees is medium and low.

The research was guided by the following questions which provide insights into the problem:

1. How the Karabakh conflict has impacted the lives of women in the Barda region;
2. What peace and security mean for the women;
3. What the role of women is in the peace-building and peacekeeping process;
4. Future perspectives on living together again of Armenia and Azerbaijan communities;
5. Women's recommendations or advice for the future generation towards Armenia and Azerbaijan relations.

## **Analysis of the Interviews and Key Findings**

### ***Karabakh conflict's effect on rural women***

Azerbaijan has one of the highest per-capita populations of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world. According to the official statistics of Azerbaijan, as of the end of 2014, there are 622,892 internally displaced from Nagorno Karabakh and seven surrounding regions, amounting to approximately 7% of the country's total population<sup>1</sup>. According to the legislation of Azerbaijan, IDPs and persons equated to them (hereinafter - "IDPs") have several privileges, such as:

- Provision of temporary living space,
- Providing employment,
- Social security,
- Medical care,
- Ensuring the right to education,
- Transport and housing and communal and other benefits.<sup>2</sup>

However, sometimes these benefits for IDPs have been met with dissatisfaction by the local population. There are many reasons for dissatisfaction among the local population, such as reduction of employment opportunities, especially the increase in population density in urban

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<sup>1</sup> The official webpage of The State Committee for refugee and IDP issues of the Republic of Azerbaijan <http://idp.gov.az/en>

<sup>2</sup> Refer to: [669-IQ - Məcburi köçkünlərin və onlara bərabər tutulan şəxslərin sosial müdafiəsi haqqında \(e-qanun.az\)](#)

centers, tuition fees, high taxes, and other budget expenditures (which are often associated with the exemption of IDPs from any payments).

As it is mentioned above, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan started in 1905 and recrudesced in 1918, however despite all the sufferings, both nations tried to live together peacefully in the regions until another Armenian invasion began in 1988 (Aydin and Babayeva, 2022). The good neighborhood atmosphere with the Armenian people before the war turned into mutual hatred, chaos, and the emergence of endless problems. In general, while analyzing the interviews it could be observed that all women described a peaceful life in the absence of discrimination and disputes with the Armenians until the Armenian invasion started in 1988.

**Participant 1:** “It was my wedding day in 1988, my friends came from the territory that they had a fight between Armenians and Azerbaijanis at that time, they came here and talked about that fight. The anxiety on their faces could be easily and obviously realized how they were scared. From that time until now, this war is still going on. When the 20 January (Black January)<sup>3</sup> happened in 1990, I was married, I lived with my father-in-law, and this affected us all awfully, every time I watch it on TV, I even remember that my father spoke what he heard to us nervously and lamentingly. During that time, the killing of innocent people, especially the Khojaly tragedy<sup>4</sup>, affected us terribly. The killing of innocent people overnight was blood and thunder. Refugees came from Kalbajar and Aghdam<sup>5</sup> - it was heartbreaking to see the plight of war, and the people of our village did their best to help them. Despite this, those people were forcibly expelled from their warm homes. We used to live with the Armenian people as friends and neighbors, but since then our hatred for Armenians has increased” (P1, 53 years old from Mollali village).

As respondents state, the Karabakh war brought disaster, death, pain as well as social problems that emerged right after the war to the region. Another woman expressed that this conflict made her entire life psychologically unbearable and even in her dreams she feels that she is in the war again and again.

<sup>3</sup> “January Massacre, was a violent crackdown on the civilian population of Baku on 19–20 January 1990, as part of a state of emergency during the dissolution of the Soviet Union”, <https://supremecourt.gov.az/en/static/view/22>

<sup>4</sup> “The Khojaly massacre was the mass murder of ethnic Azerbaijanis — mostly civilians, but also armed troops — by Armenian armed forces and the 366th CIS regiment of the Soviet Union in the town of Khojaly on 25-26 February 1992. This massacre was the bloodiest tragedy of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/pages/163/>

<sup>5</sup> Kalbajar and Aghdam are the cities which were occupied during the I Karabakh War.

**Participant 2:** “When the Armenian-Muslim<sup>6</sup> conflict began in 1988, we were directly involved in that conflict, so it almost had a huge effect on my youth and childhood, it was never erased from my mind. Because I entered my first-year university, the Pedagogical University, in 1992, during the sharpest period of the war. When I returned to the village for a summer vacation in 1993, it was the occupation year. On August 23, I had an engagement day, and our village was occupied on that day. I went out with my fiancé's family. Therefore, both the First and Second Karabakh Wars affected my lifestyle and psychics. After the occupation of our village, I studied at the university, but nevertheless, when I saw our village in a dream, I never saw it as in peacetime. I thought we were running away; Armenians were coming and shooting ... For a very long time, gradually, my psychics normalized a bit, but I think that living a refugee life, living the war, will never be erased from anyone's psychics. Those long-sufferings, first, the difficulties of the Soviet era, the transition period, the poverty, then the loss of home, relatives, and people you know ... it's true, we didn't know that much when we were young, and the Soviet youth didn't have that much patriotism. Young people are more patriotic. The deaths of two people during the First World War had an awfully enormous effect on me. One was the death of Chingiz Mustafayev, and the other was my sister's fiancé, who died in that war, and we were close friends, family friends, lost to my classmates and relatives. It is as if everything you see with your eyes suddenly disappears and is destroyed. We encountered those hardships at that time. But during the Second Karabakh War, it probably affected me worse psychologically, because I had a family then, now I was a MOTHER ... so it affects me more, I'm afraid of losing my children when I'm a mother, and you have empathy for the mothers of dead martyrs ... (she cries). A little girl had died in Garayusifli, and I couldn't help myself when I saw his gaze” (P2, 46 years old, Jijimli village- IDP from Jabrayil District).

Karabakh war has also huge economic effect on the women that caused plenty of problems.

**Participant 3:** “Since 1992, I have witnessed all the consequences of this war, I have witnessed fatalities and skirmishes, I worked as a chief accountant in the Aghdam city council, I left at the last minute. It is true that my family left before, but my husband and I used to stay and continue to work. He also worked as a deputy at the Grain factory. We witnessed the occupation of Aghdam, saw the martyrs and the wounded, went through severe trauma, and then moved from one region to another: Gakh, Sheki regions, and Baku city. We finally came to Barda<sup>7</sup> and began to live here. Those events were a heavy blow to me, we suffered a lot, we did not find bread for weeks, and we suffered a lot” (P3, 62 years old, Aliyanli village – IDP from Aghdam District).

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<sup>6</sup> Nagorno Karabakh War sometimes is called Armenian – Muslim conflict among Azerbaijanis, especially in rural parts of the country.

<sup>7</sup> Barda was one of the conflict-affected regions that next to the territories which the war was going on and during the 44-day war it was shelled heaps of times and many civilians lost their lives.



In general, the Karabakh war has had a very negative effect on the lives of people, especially IDPs, mainly women, and it seems that the psychological traumas, along with the physical injuries as well as financial and social harms, will not be erased from people's memory and lifestyles for a long time.

### **Rural Women's Remarks on Peace And Security**

Although certain agreements were repeatedly reached during the nearly 30-year-old Karabakh war, peace talks failed. The protracted conflict and the fact that politicians always come back "empty" from the negotiation roundtables, especially the April escalation in 2016, there had a very negative effect on the trust for peace of both nations. After the second Karabakh war in 2020, women said they did not want war at all and wanted peace. All women interviewed were in favor of peace and emphasized that the war did not benefit anyone. They hope that with the liberation of the occupied territories, the conflict would end with the signing of a peace agreement. It can be observed that for many women peace could be defined in two categories: living without war and danger and experiencing no fear and anxiety. This means that there is a need for a stable country and community and that the chances that a new war will happen are very little. The second meaning can be seen as a personal need of the women for psychosocial support programs which would help them to address their constant psychological traumas and anxiety.

**Participant 4:** “When I say peace, I mean calmness and prosperity for all. It would always be good if there was peace, war did not give anything to anyone, why should death and bloodshed be? Peace is to live calmly. The conflict resolution is also a period of peace” (P4, 34 years old, Kalantarli village – IDP from Shusha).

Some believe that Armenia is ruled from abroad and they are forced to occupy Azerbaijan territories and blame “the other side” for that.

**Participant 5:** “Peace means the resolution of the conflict, in fact, if the conflict is resolved, there will be peace. Peace is when people have no fear, no protection - for example, I would like to live comfortably without the police, or the army, but I must know that nothing can happen, just as there are countries in the world where there is peace. It does not occur to anyone that someone can invade Switzerland, America, that an American citizen should fear war - I want our people to live like that, we have a right to do so. We all are humans – God’s creatures. Both sides must be in the same position to resolve the conflict. They (Armenians) do not accept our position. If they do not have outside interference, if they live according to the people's desires, perhaps peace will be possible. The years we lived together peacefully, we wrote songs, people came and went, became relatives, and friends, and stayed at each other's homes. I saw so many Armenians who came and stayed in

our houses, worked as craftsmen, and they treated us kindly. Now 30,000 Armenians do not live in Baku on their own, they do not want such conflicts, but what can we do? Conflicts are controlled from the outside; the occupants cannot do anything. They are irritated from the outside " (P5, 67 years old, Garayusifli village).

For 29 years IDP women have been living in a «suitcase mood» and after the liberation of their hometowns in 2020, most women consider themselves happy, however, they still have some concerns about moving back to their homes due to the security issues, and the resumption of war. Women think that living secure means no need to be afraid of anything or feeling calm.

**Participant 6:** “You are secure from something you are afraid of, you are not in danger wherever you go, and you can come and go easily, you can do your job comfortably. That's security, I think. After coming here - Barda from Aghdam, there was a war going on. They were shooting at Aghdam and Tartar<sup>8</sup>, but we were not afraid that they would not shoot at Barda. But after the 44-day war, they threw a lot of missiles at Barda, the remains fell on us, how many people died... I was always afraid of the sound after that explosion... (P6, 64 years old, Barda – IDP from Aghdam District).

Most women who took part in the research expressed a fear of the reoccurrence of the war and cannot believe that this ends because of the daily news on the media they followed.

**Participant 7:** “During the 44-day war, I did not normally sleep through the night without fear. Even if everyone was asleep, I couldn't sleep, I was afraid that at any moment there could be an explosion, a tragedy while I was asleep. That's why I haven't had a quiet night in 44 days. This is the danger. I taught during the day, the house suddenly shook, and I had to stop the lesson, you know how painful it is to see that fear and anxiety in the faces of children. This is the danger. For me, safe life is to live without the sound of bullets, and no fear of war, death, or blood. If peace is not fully established, I cannot say that I feel completely safe, because even today we feel that there are shootings in Nakhchivan<sup>9</sup>, and in certain regions, which gives us reason to worry that the threat has not completely subsided. That is why we are still in a state of turmoil.” (P7, 41 years old, Tumasli village).

To sum up, women are in favor of peace, and they consider that war does not benefit anyone, however, they believe that even though the war is over, there is a probability of recrudescence of the war and it is stated that the fear of war will not end before the peace agreement is signed.

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<sup>8</sup> Tartar is located in the west of the country and belongs to the Upper Karabakh Economic Region. The district borders the districts of Kalbajar, Goranboy, Yevlakh, Barda, and Aghdam. [https://nmdk.gov.az/page/region\\_info/249](https://nmdk.gov.az/page/region_info/249)

<sup>9</sup> The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is a landlocked exclave of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The region covers 5,502.75 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 463,000 bordering Armenia to the east and north, Iran to the south and west, and Turkey to the northwest. [https://nakhchivan.preslib.az/en\\_a1.html](https://nakhchivan.preslib.az/en_a1.html)

## **The Role of Women in the Peace-Building and Peacekeeping Process**

Regarding the role of women in peacebuilding, it was assessed not at the political level, but at the household level. Interviewees think that a woman is first and foremost a mother, a nurturer of her children, and if a woman teaches her children love, compassion, and the sin of killing others to their children, it is a contribution to peacebuilding. Most respondents said that men fight in the war, and the consequences of the war were more burdensome for women, because a woman who loses a child, a husband, or a brother is deeply traumatized and can never escape grief. Some of the interviewees, who think that Azerbaijanis are more tolerant and compassionate, underline the importance of teaching Armenian women to be compassionate to their children.

**Participant 8:** “A woman is first and foremost a mother, an educator, the role of a mother is great, and her respect is great. We have brought up our children in such a way that we have always wanted peace, we have brought up the child in such a way that we can share what we have with a friend, be kind, love the whole world, love the people, and so on. But unfortunately, I would say to the Armenian women to bring up their children and future generations like us, so that they do not go into conflict with their neighbors and people, there is no end to the conflict. Everything changes, and they must understand that. My role in peacebuilding is that if I am a teacher, first, I tell children to be patriotic, not to leave the village. No matter how scared I was in 44 days, I still couldn't leave. First, everything is solved by love, the love of elimination, the love of my people, my family. It would be great if we could form these qualities in a person.” (P8, 54 years old, Alpout village).

During the interview process, the women mentioned that they do not have any certain active women in their region who dedicate their activities to the peacebuilding process, except a woman from Jijimly village; she also stated that if women control the war, they will not let it happen.

**Participant 2:** “Now is the time when I think that peacebuilding also needs brave ones to go and take part. Otherwise, they will be lynched by others as a "traitor" on both sides, either from that side or from this side ... True, I suddenly think, I look at it from the Armenian side, there are young children without two arms, and we have too. I think no mother wants to experience it, whether it is this side or that side. But in the end, this conflict must be resolved so that no one can experience it again. I think that if women run the war, they will not allow it to happen.” (P2, 46 years old, Jijimli village- IDP from Jabrayil District).

Generally, according to the results of this part, women are supposed to be mothers and busy taking care of families as well as no clues to know any women role models in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping process in the country, especially in the rural parts and outside of the capital

Baku. As women are excluded from the peace talks due to traditions and mindsets, especially in patriarchal societies, they cannot imagine themselves taking part in peacebuilding activities.

### **Future Perspectives On Living Together Again of Armenia and Azerbaijan Communities and Recommendations by Women for Future Generations**

‘In a militarized patriotic nation, where the “Other” is consistently portrayed as a threat, irrevocably different, and less peaceful or willing to compromise, imagining peace can be a difficult task’ (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019). Throughout history, many people have managed to live together for centuries, even though their languages, religions, and origins are different, and they continue to live in the Caucasus, one of the most difficult regions of the world, despite the war. However, there is suffering in the region because of the desire of some strong states to become more powerful, and the dream of some weak states such as Armenia to become bigger. Almost none of the women living in the region expected that the Armenians would attempt such an invasion despite some painful events in the past. However, the suffering had turned into never-ending anger in the hearts of women. These sufferings destroy the possibility for both communities to live together. Most of the women participating in the research stated that it was not possible to live with them in any way due to the endless persecution of Armenians for nearly a hundred years. Each of them expresses their reaction by saying;

“It seems to me that living together with Armenians will not happen, we will see those days again, we will experience that stress and excitement, no, I do not believe it. I trust both our army and the president. It will not be possible to live together again, because we lost a lot, the only son of the family was killed. Even if we live with them, we will always have hatred in our hearts for them, and we will want to avenge our losses. Therefore, it is better not to live together.” (P9, 37 years old, Taghilar village).

A woman who lost her brother during the II Karabakh War (44 days) in 2020 in consequence of Armenia’s missile attack on Barda on 28.10.2020, articulates that even she is ready to give up her native lands if the Armenians continue to live there.

**Participant 10:** “There are many people who think like me, we do not want to share the same territory with Armenians, people are already so aware of their (Armenian) character that most of them are women. For example, men sometimes make "friends" with each other, but women, especially mothers who have lost a son, never want to live in the same region with them. And I am sure that there will be conflicts in the future, even if they are forced to live together, even if the conditions require it, even if intergovernmental agreements are signed, the conflicts may escalate, in my opinion. A ceasefire was signed again on November 9, who will stay there? Personally, no

one can take me there. I will give up on the land where they live, even if it is mine. My opinion on this is firm. No matter what is offered to me, no matter the circumstances, no matter the position, there is a saying among the people, "I have no stomach for seeing them. Nothing can force me." (P10, 32 years old, Barda).

Regarding women's advice or recommendations to the future generations, most of the responses are about getting an education and being intelligent, not forgetting the history and remembering always the 'enemy', as well as being careful in terms of relations with Armenians:

"I would recommend to the next generation to be educated, an ignorant person cannot make the right decisions, an educated person is an intelligent person, a person with a normal level of education and humanity. Whether in a conflict-free period, he or she never forgets that the enemy is the enemy. They say, "Don't forget your past, because it is the teacher of the future." It is clear what we have experienced in the past, I have lost my brother in the Second Karabakh War, and, above all, in the First Karabakh War, Khojaly tragedy cannot allow me to forgive Armenians. Let the organizations defending the Armenians, the countries that support Azerbaijan, read the Khojaly tragedy at least once and look at the facts." (P10, 32 years old, Barda).

Some women blame the older relatives that they did not remind or tell anything about the Armenians' vandalism towards Azerbaijanis in history, therefore in the 1990s, they did not imagine that someday, Armenians could kill Azerbaijanis: *"I am angry with our older generation because my grandmother said everything, but not once did she tell us about the Armenian-Muslim war so that we would remember something, at least be careful."* (P2, 46 years old, Jijimli village - IDP from Jabrayil District). Although the hearts of women continued to burn, they tried to express uneasily that it was possible to live with them again. But their biggest fear is 'insecurity'. Because they had experienced this situation many times, and each of them lost a life of their own in return: *"I am not sure that this case will be completely real now, and that the Armenian people, thinking like us, will not hit us from behind again in a peaceful way, without using tricks on us. Because we have lived this past many times, and if I say today, yes, I am absolutely convinced that we can live together again in a completely safe environment, I personally do not believe it. For many years, we gave the Armenians a place to live, but they hit us from behind. During the years we lived with them, I started from Goycha District, we lived together, then we were oppressed, we lived again, we were hit from behind."* (P7, 41 years old, Tumasli village).

Shortly, it is obviously seen that living of two nations together again is almost impossible at least within 10 years. As some interviewees mentioned, the traces and scars of the previous war

are so recent it will take more time to recover and forget what happened in order to live peacefully again.

## **Conclusion**

The Karabakh conflict, which has been at its worst since 1988 and resulted in the violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in the 1990s, has left thousands of dead, missing, and maimed, as well as psychologically traumatizing both nations (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Available information on the death toll is very controversial: different sources provide numbers that vary between 18,000 and 30,000 deaths. The intensity of the conflict varies significantly depending on the death toll estimates (Grusha and Hamilton, 2015).

In the undeclared war, 20,000 Azerbaijanis were martyred, 5,000 were disabled, and 100,000 were injured. The number of refugees and displaced people has exceeded one million. 3890 Azerbaijanis were also missing (Virtual Karabakh).

On 27 September 2020, a new large-scale war erupted that lasted until 10 November with a ceasefire by Russia. It brought an end to the deadliest fighting the region had witnessed in nearly three decades with over 7,000 military and about 170 civilians killed and many more wounded (International Crisis Group, 2023). According to Azerbaijan, the fighting left 2907 Azerbaijani soldiers (Virtual Karabakh) and 95 civilians dead, while 6 Azerbaijani were still missing. Armenian authorities stated that the fighting had left 3825 Armenians dead (Armenian Prime Minister).

Nagorno-Karabakh is a potential transit zone for the region, as it can link the Caucasus and Europe for the purpose of trade. While investment in the economy of Nagorno-Karabakh could fulfill this capability, the existing conflict has frozen the potential for prosperous economic relations throughout Eurasia (Shukurova and Gadimova, 2018). The Karabakh war was not only a loss of life but also caused great economic damage to both countries, especially Azerbaijan. In addition, the development of trade relations in the region has been slow due to the presence of a hotbed of war in the region and the lack of ties between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the closure of borders. The damage caused to the Azerbaijani economy because of the war is about \$ 53.5 billion (Najafzadeh, 2013).

The negative effects of the conflict have been reflected in the migration crisis in the two countries faced. Due to the conflict, many local Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the region were forced to leave their homes in fear of being persecuted (some 30,000 people from both sides lost their lives between 1991 and 1994). Moreover, this migration crisis has led to an increased

urbanization in the South Caucasus region. In the case of Azerbaijan, people started to migrate from the Nagorno-Karabakh region to other parts of Azerbaijan, especially Baku and other larger cities, creating a massive increase in urbanization (Shukurova and Gadimova, 2018).

Considering the results of interviews with 10 women, it can be obviously seen that the Karabakh conflict has had a huge negative effect on women's lives, mentally, economically, and socially. As answers to questions about the impact of conflict on women show, the Karabakh War has had a very negative impact on people's lives, especially on internally displaced people, mainly women, with psychological trauma turning into physical wounds. The economic and social damage will never disappear from people's memories and lives.

The country's long history of war has left the role of women in society as "housewives" and deepened gender inequality. This can be seen in the responses to the question "the role of women in peacebuilding"; The role of women in peacebuilding has been assessed only at the household level. At the same time, the lack of recognition of women peacekeepers in society (9 out of 10 respondents said they did not know anyone in this field) indicates that there are few or no women working in this field or perhaps they refrain from working openly due to the fear of getting a hammering in the society. According to the participants, women are said to be mothers, busy taking care of their families, and especially in rural areas, outside of the capital city - Baku, they do not know female role models in the process of peacebuilding and peacekeeping in the country. Especially in patriarchal societies, women are excluded from peace negotiations by their traditions and ways of thinking, so it is unimaginable to participate in peacebuilding activities.

According to the interviewees, they want no war and the conflict to end peacefully, and the failure to sign a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan shows that the threat has not yet been completely subsided. In particular, the daily coverage of ceasefire violations in the media creates fear in society and enables to form an impression that "there is a threat of war at any moment." Women support peace and believe that war benefits no one, but even if the war is over, it may break out again, and until a peace treaty is signed, the fear of war will continue, and it is believed it will never end.

The 2 wars as consequences of repeated escalations and skirmishes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis have created hatred and mistrust in Azerbaijani society, so respondents to the question of "the possibility of coexistence with Armenians" were almost negative. It follows that the lack of "international diplomacy" has led to a gap between the two communities and has prolonged the Karabakh conflict. Clearly, it is almost impossible for two nations to coexist again

within at least ten years. As some interviewees have noted, the wounds and scars of previous wars are very recent. This will take longer to recover and forget what happened to live in peace again.

In general, the recent history of the 44-day war and the fact that Barda was also badly damaged by the missiles and the loss of lives have deepened people's hatred towards Armenians. I think that the fact that this conflict was frozen until September 27, 2020, created a "forgetfulness" in people, as if "everything is in the past." The freshness of the wounds of the war, and the propaganda of the "enemy image" on both sides will slow down the peacebuilding process, which will affect the processes in the region. The results of the interviews clearly showed that women have mistrust, hatred, and anger towards Armenians, and in addition, almost all women have expressed a negative attitude towards the idea of living together due to distrust and fear of Armenians.

In an international context, this topic has been little studied so far. This is seen as an important factor in which rural women's opinions are not taken into account. Although some research has been conducted on the effects of the Karabakh War, most researchers approach the conflict from a general point of view. As previous studies have shown, only men participate in the peace process in patriarchal societies, while women are excluded from the peace process because of social norms and stereotypes against women. The "enemy identity" formed in Azerbaijani and Armenian societies have had and will continue to have a negative impact on the peacebuilding process.

To sum up some steps need to be taken to support women's participation in peacebuilding:

- Firstly, hate speech at the state level should be reduced;
- Encourage women's social and political participation;
- Eliminate women's economic dependence and achieve their integration into the economy;
- Involve women in peacebuilding;
- Identify a link between peacebuilding and livelihoods;
- Bringing Azerbaijani women together with Armenian women or listening to each other's memories of the war;
- Creating conditions for dialogue between Armenian and Azerbaijani women, etc.

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**ANNEX-1:**  
Photographs



**Photograph 1:**  
II Karabakh War traces, bullet hole on the gate, Dordyol, Aghdam



**Photograph 2:**  
Burned car during II Karabakh War, Gapanli, Tartar



**Photograph 3:**  
Destroyed house after the bombing of the village, Garadaghli, Tartar.