

# **URBAN INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF THE DISPLACED FROM NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in forcible displacement of the population in and from the region. This research explored the integration process and challenges of the forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) in the capital city of Armenia, Yerevan. The urban setting was chosen as the framework to study the FDPs' right to the city, their experience of living in Yerevan, as well as their opportunities to contribute to the city-making. The research found out main challenges and milestones of the integration process. It became obvious that social and economic integration, preparedness of social workers, the involvement of the municipality are critical in facilitating the access of the FDPs to the city.

## **INTRODUCTION**

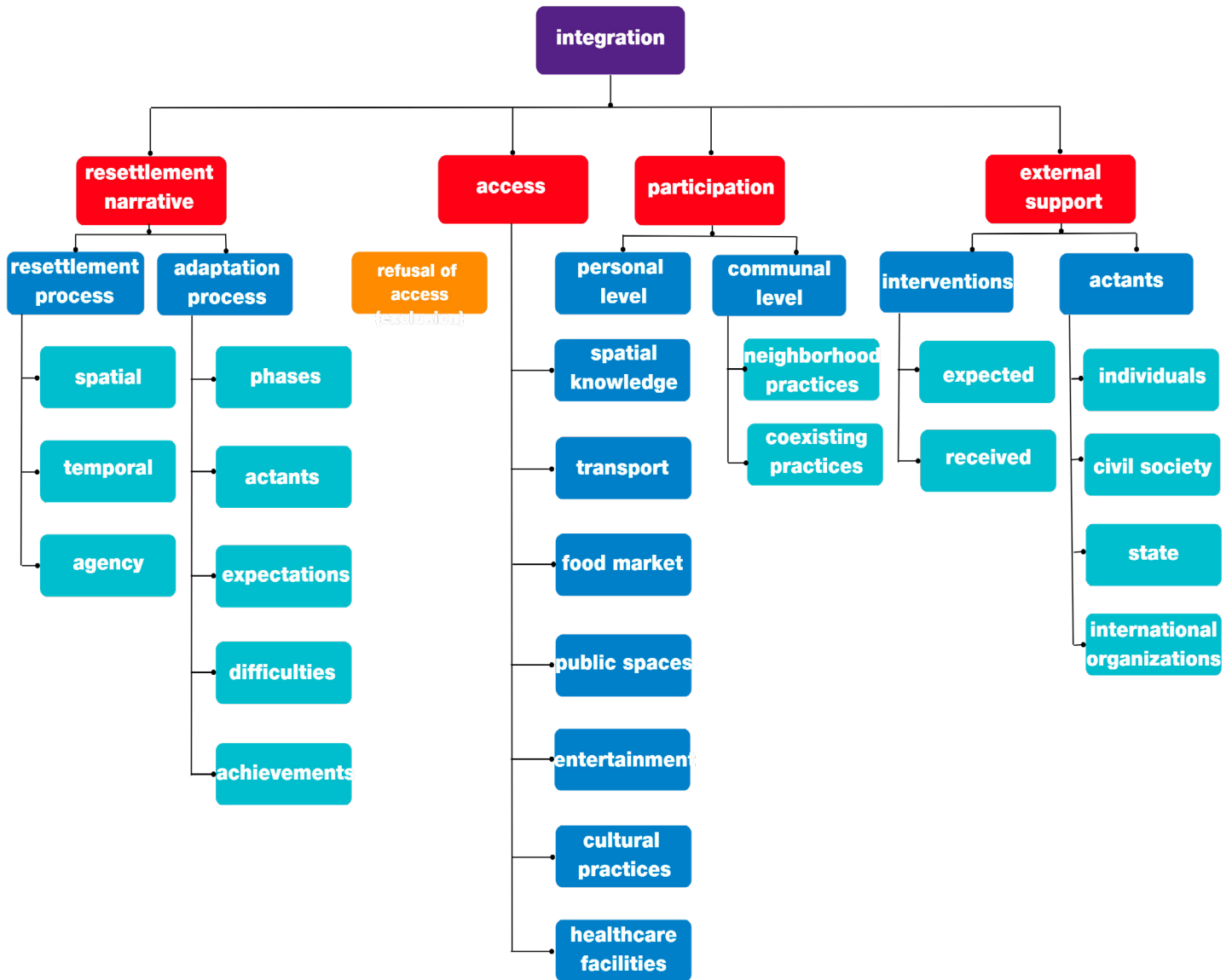
In the year of 2020 Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) experienced 44 days of war with Azerbaijan. The massive war caused destruction and forcible displacement in and from NK, causing crisis in a wide range of areas. Population of NK had to leave their houses and properties and reside in the Republic of Armenia. In addition to this, the population of Shushi, Hadrut, Kashatagh and Shahumyan regions lost their houses and are unable to return, since by the ceasefire of November 9, 2020, those regions are under the control of Azerbaijan. The displaced population of NK have been accommodated across Armenia, mainly in the big cities such as Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, etc.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM**

Displacement of population from NK caused massive violation of human rights. In addition, war and displacement exposed women, children, and people with disabilities to the possibility of increasing their vulnerability. In this regard, the proposed research project studied "right to the city", housing and privacy of displaced people of second NK war during and after the 44-day war and to what extent capital city Yerevan was and is ready to host those forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) as an urban space.

According to the experience of other cities, urban spaces need to have open-minded local government bodies, active and involved civil society, as well as opportunities for the migrants to get involved in local politics to be able to successfully integrate immigrants in the urban context (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016; Anttiroiko and Jong 2020). Our study sheds light on this aspect too, not only contributing to the existing literature on migrant integration in cities, but also showing specificities of post-Soviet cities in this context.

This research has concentrated on the realization of human rights by FDPs from NK in terms of space consumption and participation in space organization processes in Yerevan’s dormitories. Realization of the right to participate, as well as space consumption are seen as part of the FDPs integration process in the hosting environment, where both the social networks and the institutions play a vital role in the process of social integration.



The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) war, among many consequences, has also caused a wave of forcible displacement of population. The forcibly displaced population of Nagorno-Karabakh have been accommodated across Armenia, mainly in the big cities such as Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor and other communities. Displacement of population from Nagorno-Karabakh caused massive violation of human rights such as the right to freedom of movement, education, rest, loss of property etc. In addition, violation of human rights, war and displacement exposed women, children, people with disabilities to the possibility of increasing their vulnerability.

In this regard, research project studies “right to the city”, housing and privacy of displaced people of second Nagorno-Karabakh war during and after the 44-day war and to what extent capital city Yerevan was and is ready to host those FDPs as an urban space. Exploration of this research topic is important since there are still FDPs in Yerevan one year after the 44-day war, who need proper integration policies and approaches that will address the issues of social isolation and disintegration within the society. From a human rights perspective, the research topic is addressing two main issues: people on the move, particularly forcibly displaced persons and secondly inclusive societies with the stress in realization of human rights at local level (cities and infrastructure).

The main focus in this research project has been twofold, including two important aspects of the “right to the city”, namely the right to access to the city and its services, as well as the right to participate in the “city-making” (transforming their surrounding area in the specific context of this research). Exploration of this research topic is important since there are still FDPs in Yerevan after one and a half years of the war, who need proper integration policies and approach not to become isolated and socially disintegrated.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Addressing the research problem described in the previous section, this study answers the following research question:

How is the right to the city realized in the context of shelter provision among Karabakhi FDPs in Yerevan?

The research question has been examined on two levels: systemic and individual. In particular, we focus on the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent is the FDPs’ right to access and participation in integration processes regulated through local and state policies?
2. How do FDPs realize their right to access and participation in the context of the shelter provision?

## FINDINGS

The Armenian legislature does not specifically address the situation of the forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) in the Republic of Armenia. However, the Armenian government has adopted several legislative acts that concern the conditions of refugees, asylum-seekers, as well as others in a refugee-like situation. The legislature also touches upon the arrangement in case of emergencies.

According to the law (Law on the State of Emergency Legal Regime, RA, 2012) that specifies the responsibilities of the state in the state of emergency, people, who suffered property losses, will be fully reimbursed/refunded by the state, or the property that was captured by the state should be returned within a week after the state of emergency is ceased. The Law on Refugees and Asylum (Law on Refugees and Asylum, RA 2008) adopted in 2008 mentions clearly that people who are in asylum-seeking situations or refugees should be given temporary shelter. The government decides the location of the shelter and is obliged to provide all necessary basic products, such as a soap, tooth brush, toilet paper, tissues, etc.

Refugees and asylum-seekers are allowed to stay in temporary shelters before there has been a final decision made about their application to stay in Armenia. At the same time, the rules (Order on Setting Internal Rules for Asy-

lum-Seekers at Residency at Temporary Shelters, RA 2016) by which refugees/asylum-seekers should abide while living at temporary shelters are quite strict and specific. The shelter is open from 7 o'clock in the morning until 11 at night. Guests are allowed from 10 till 17:00. There are certain rules as to what kind of property is allowed to have at the shelter. There is a special schedule for the showers. Access to kitchen facilities are specified as well. The manager of the shelter is in charge of all decisions concerning its residents.

Another Government decision (Decision on Establishing the Procedure for Providing Financial Assistance to Asylum-Seekers, RA 2016) states that in case of impossibility of providing refugees/asylum-seekers with temporary shelters, the government is obliged to pay a fixed amount of money that can be used for rent. This can be done only for the period of 3 months. It is unclear how the Armenian government has categorized FDPs from NK, but as we will discuss in our analysis and findings sessions, it seems like a mixed approach was used, where some people were transferred to temporary shelters, while others were given money to rent their own places.

This qualitative research brings about a number of thought-provoking and scientifically significant findings. Those findings are to be first and foremost considered within the research framework and study scopes, as the results do not claim to be representative. Instead, the findings showcase more in-depth insights into FDPs' experience with adaptation and integration, hinting on potential directions of relevant policy recommendations.

We find it apt to highlight a few of the findings that are scientifically significant in this research problem, and that could be useful policy-wise, however, the research team will keep from extending specific recommendations, given that we do not consider ourselves experts in migration policies.

## KEY FINDINGS

### The main findings of this enquiry are summed up in a number of points, as follows:

1. The outset of the resettlement process is characterized by the quality of temporality.
2. Passive form of adaptation is a common strategy in a form of toleration, rather than integration.
3. Migrants tend to passively refuse their right to the city, in a way alienating themselves from their own rights as a migrant, and thus the status of the migrant indirectly.
4. The key adaptation challenges most migrants experience are within the emotional spectrum, including alienation, idealization of Nagorno-Karabakh, deprivation, fears and emotional distress.
5. Most of the emotional and rational difficulties of the FDPs are connected to, if not resulted from, a poor top-down coordination.
6. Generally, in principle, Nagorno-Karabakh migrants do not face the issues that migrants of other origins could experience in Armenia, due to the absence of language barriers, previous history of work- or family-related visits, proximity of important spatial units, and availability of supportive devices.
7. In some cases, migrants report feeling verbally discriminated against by the members of the Armenian society.
8. Symbolic and social dimensions of migrant integration appear to play a much more central role than institutional participation, economic support and spatial aspirations.
9. Despite the clear desire to become an active participant of the recreation of their homely environments, migrants usually have very little freedom to do so.
10. Generally, there is a significant discrepancy between system practices and local practices.
11. Because of the lack of official systematic measures or defined principles of accommodating FDPs in Armenia, in some cases, the top-down institutional functions have been taken over by the proactive initiatives of FDPs.

# SUMMARY

In summary, we are able to observe a striking phenomenon among the FDPs from NK, who in a way, experienced the notion of “familiar otherness” in Armenia. Although being Armenian, speaking in Armenian and generally belonging to the same cultural environment, most of the migrants felt as “others”, and as people who do not fully fit. The experiences with integration, inclusion/exclusion, and access and participation that were studied in this research, are thus interpreted as the consequences of that “familiar otherness.”

We would also like to mention that:

- The aspect of social integration should be put a special emphasis on.
- The receiving society should also be educated against hate speech and discrimination. This must include the capacity building of social workers, who work with FDPs.
- The government should be concerned with creating economic opportunities for the FDPs in addition to financial support, as the economic integration of them would directly influence other spheres of their lives.
- District authorities and the municipality should be given more responsibilities in the process of the integration of the FDPs in Yerevan, this way taking some of the workload of central state authorities.

Hence, the results that this study indicates, should ideally be viewed in the context of this evidence- proven insight, which also in itself contextualizes potential policy interventions aimed at improving the resettlement and integration experience of people severely affected by the war.

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