

B.2 Azerbaijan - 1992 - Conflict - People displaced

Case study: Upgrade of collective centres

Project type:

Upgrade of collective centres

Disaster:

Nagorno Karabakh conflict

No. of people displaced:

700,000 people displaced
40,915 families (169,609 people) came to Baku in 1992-1993

Project target population:

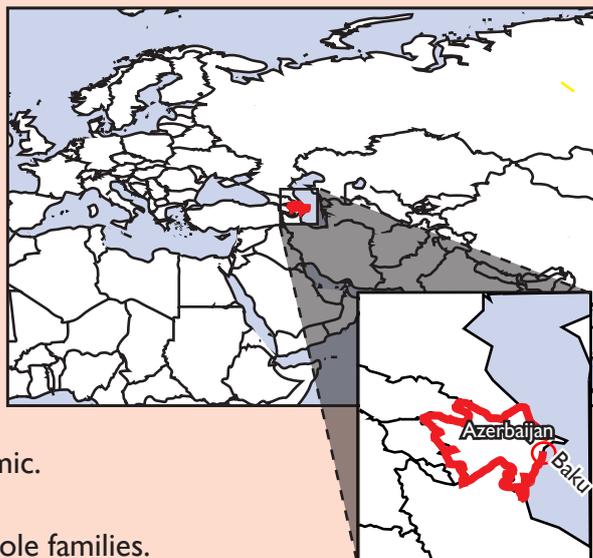
27,500 people in over 60 buildings over 8 years

Occupancy rate on handover:

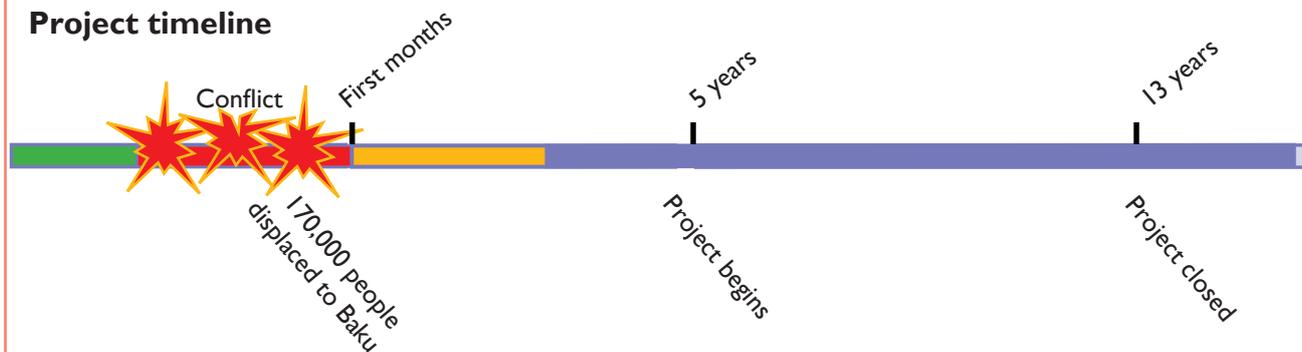
No data. Room allocation in the buildings is dynamic.

Shelter size

Variable. Individual rooms are often shared by whole families.



Project timeline



Summary

This programme upgraded and maintained public buildings that people had moved to during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s. The project worked with families who, by the end of the project, had been displaced for over ten years. The way of working evolved over time, starting with contractor-led construction and evolving into direct implementation by the NGO. Although the project closed without a clear exit strategy, aspects of the project were taken up by the government in their housing policies.

Strengths and weaknesses

X This project provided essential maintenance. The buildings were often poor to start with and had further deteriorated with the long-term displacements.

X The project was able to adapt its methods to improve cost effectiveness. The final approach was to directly supervise hired master craftsmen and to use contractors to provide materials.

W The programme did not have a clear exit strategy from the outset. This led to some difficulties when the project was finally closed after eight years.

W Overpopulation, lack of a sense of ownership and high resident turnover reduced the overall durability of both repair and community activism.

W The project could have included closer cooperation with the authorities for further upkeep and maintenance. Success of the rehabilitation largely depended on close cooperation and support from the local authorities, since many problems required intervention outside the public building.

This case study draws heavily on: *Project review report: Public building rehabilitation, Baku, Azerbaijan*, by Bayaz Zeynalova, 2007. (www.reliefweb.int)



Bathrooms before and after upgrade

Context

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the early 1990s led to over 500,000 people becoming internally displaced and a further 200,000 becoming refugees. Around half of the internally displaced people moved to urban areas, most of them to the capital, Baku.

In Baku, many people moved into dilapidated, overpopulated public buildings, most of which were originally student residence halls and dormitories. The buildings were designed with rooms intended for one person, not for families of five or more. The kitchens and bathrooms were shared. In some cases the buildings were without water supply or sanitation. This was in the context of a significant growth in wealth in Baku, in part due to the oil industry.

The temporary shelter solutions found following the conflict lasted longer than was expected. Many of those displaced following the conflict had been living in one of twelve camps. The last of these did not close until 2008, after fifteen years. Upon its closure, many of the camp residents were resettled rather than being able to return to their original homes.

The climate in Baku is cool and wet in the winter and hot and dry in the summer, leading to challenges of leaking roofs and poor sanitation.

Selection of buildings

A programme to upgrade the public buildings and schools was adopted.

Criteria for the selection of public buildings for inclusion in the programme were adjusted throughout the project period. However, the main criteria remained unchanged: at least 70% of building inhabitants had to be IDPs; other organisations could not have previously worked in the building; and the building had to be in exceptionally bad condition.

In its first years (1998-1999), the project prioritised hostels located next to each other and that shared a common yard. Such locations made repair works easier and reduced costs. Letters from local or central authorities, as well as applications from the residents, were also considered in the selection process.

The willingness of the building residents to work with the NGO was the decisive factor in the final selection. Inhabitants had to be willing to volunteer to help with repairs, and to clean corridors and shared areas. In some cases, works had to be suspended until the community agreed to fulfil the NGO's conditions.

Not everyone benefited equally from the project. Although similar works were performed in most of the buildings, several of them were only partially rehabilitated (only roof or electricity) for a variety of reasons.



Photo: NRC Azerbaijan

Technical solutions

Inhabitants saw broken sewerage as the greatest problem in the buildings. Other common problems included shortage of water, leaking roofs and dampness. As a result, plastering, floors and ceilings in toilets and bathrooms were damaged in most buildings.

A typical repair of a public building involved:

- rehabilitation of the shared areas - toilets, bathrooms, washing rooms, kitchens and corridors;
- infrastructure repairs - electricity, sewerage, water and sewerage pipes;
- repair of roofs;
- installation of new water heaters, sinks, stoves, faucets, showers, light bulbs, circuit breakers, switchboards, windows and doors;
- installation of electricity transformers (this was not costly but served a large number of IDPs).

The most durable output of the project was the provision of electricity systems (including transformers and switchboards) and new roofs.

The project was not always successful in solving problems with the water supply. A durable solution would have required dealing with the malfunctions outside the building, which was beyond the scope of the project. Cooking stoves and taps in the rehabilitated buildings had short lifespans because many people used them.



Photo: NRC Azerbaijan

Kitchens before and after upgrade

Implementation

An average building took two months to rehabilitate, with the implementation scheme being significantly improved over the years.

In the beginning, contractors were hired to implement the work. In practice, this meant that the NGO purchased construction materials and hired contractors to implement all works. The payment of labourers lacked transparency and important irregularities in the system were found. This led to the dismissal of project staff and the adoption of a new implementation scheme.

After two years of project implementation the NGO hired construction workers directly.

After five years of project implementation the NGO subcontracted a local company to supply construction materials. The supplier was selected on the basis of submitted quotes.

Over time, a good team of core construction workers, most of them IDPs, has been formed. Many of these have subsequently found work on other projects run by the NGO.

The involvement of community members in the work was seen as a key to the successful implementation of the project. The goal of the community programme was to ensure beneficiary buy-in and participation in the project. This was believed to be instrumental in creating a feeling of ownership and in the further maintenance and upkeep of the rehabilitated buildings.



Wiring before upgrade



One of the occupied public buildings in Baku

Occupancy

A survey conducted upon the completion of the project found that all of the buildings were still occupied by IDPs. However, the occupancy of individual rooms changed constantly. Many IDP families moved out of the buildings to an outskirt of Baku. In some cases, the emptied rooms were given to local families or those moving to Baku from other regions, but usually to other IDPs. According to the building superintendents, IDPs sell their rooms to relatives or friends. Yet some also lock their rooms and keep them as a storage space.

Obviously, the families who could afford to leave the public buildings were those who managed to establish some livelihoods and were relatively well off. The remaining occupants of the public buildings are still the most vulnerable of those living in the cities.

'The project was based on learning... We drew conclusions from the previous experience and made improvements every year. The work became more efficient over time'.

- Project staff member

Along with the large-scale construction of new settlements, urban public building rehabilitation became part of the 2004 State Programme on IDPs and Refugees. In many cases the repairs implemented by the State Social Fund for the Development of IDPs have copied this project.



Corridors before and after upgrade