

## AZERBAIJAN

***During a six-week conflict in 2020, fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces and de facto Nagorno-Karabakh security forces, led to the reported damage or destruction of over 130 schools and kindergartens. In addition, armed forces and de facto Nagorno-Karabakh security forces reportedly used schools as barracks, both during and after hostilities. Two schools in Armenia were also damaged during the fighting.***

### Context

Hostilities between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and local authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh escalated between September 27 and November 9, 2020. Conflict took place over control of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian-occupied Azerbaijani territories.<sup>311</sup> Nagorno-Karabakh is an ethnic-Armenian majority enclave located within Azerbaijan under to international law.<sup>312</sup> However, it was governed autonomously since 1994.<sup>313</sup>

On September 27, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive that escalated hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the de-facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>314</sup> During a six-week period of hostilities, Human Rights Watch reported that all parties to the conflict used cluster munitions and carried out missile, rocket, and artillery strikes in heavily populated areas, causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure, and loss of life.<sup>315</sup> In all, over 5,000 soldiers and almost 150 civilians were killed during the conflict.<sup>316</sup>

The UN reported that hostilities caused the displacement of over 130,000 people in the Nagorno-Karabakh territory and surrounding areas,<sup>317</sup> with over 60 percent of the Nagorno-Karabakh population displaced within the first month of fighting, according to the Armenian Government.<sup>318</sup>

On November 9, 2020, Russia brokered a truce that ended the six weeks of fighting, with Armenia ceding control over several territories to Azerbaijan, and without defining the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>319</sup> For example, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that Azerbaijan gained control of over 120 settlements including Shusha city (also called Shushi in Armenian), located in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>320</sup> In April 2021, Nagorno-Karabakh authorities and media reported that ceasefire violations occurred.<sup>321</sup>

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh negatively impacted education during the reporting period. Azerbaijan's Education Minister reported in January 2021 that the war interrupted teaching and learning at around 1,150 schools and for over 300,000 students.<sup>322</sup> On October 15, 2020, Armenian media outlet *Lurer* reported that over 24,000 students in Nagorno-Karabakh and over 10,800 students in bordering areas of Armenia were out of school.<sup>323</sup> In addition, humanitarian agencies and international media reported that internally displaced persons took shelter in schools during the conflict.<sup>324</sup> Furthermore, since many schools had moved to remote learning in March 2020 due to Covid-19, some displaced children could not access online lessons in temporary shelters, according to YUVA, an Azerbaijani non-governmental organization.<sup>325</sup>

Azerbaijan was not profiled in *Education under Attack 2020* so no comparison can be made with previous reporting periods.

### Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, at least 130 schools and kindergartens were reportedly damaged or destroyed in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. GCPEA had not identified any incidents of attacks on schools in Azerbaijan in the period covered by *Education under Attack 2020*.

De facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities reported that at least 71 schools and 14 kindergartens were damaged due to the hostilities.<sup>326</sup> In addition, during the conflict, a further 54 Azerbaijani schools were also damaged or destroyed, as well as several kindergartens, vocational schools, and art schools, according to Azerbaijani authorities.<sup>327</sup> All of these attacks took place within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. Many of these attacks involved shelling.<sup>328</sup> Furthermore, two schools in Armenia were damaged by explosive weapons during the fighting, according to media and Nagorno-Karabakh authorities;<sup>329</sup> Armenia did not have a sufficient number of attacks on education for a profile in this reporting period, as per the report's methodology which requires 10 attacks over a two-year period.

GCPEA identified around 30 reported incidents of attacks on schools in 2020, from Azerbaijani and Armenian media, Azerbaijani and Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs.<sup>330</sup> These attacks occurred in municipalities such as Askeran, Askipara, Ganja, Martuni (called Khojavend in Azerbaijan), and Stepanakert (called Khankendi in Azerbaijan), the administrative center of Nagorno-Karabakh. Many reports of attacks on schools described shelling and the use of explosive weapons. Human Rights Watch verified that both Armenian and Azerbaijani forces carried out attacks that struck schools or schoolyards during the conflict, some of which were indiscriminate. Examples of reported attacks included:

- Human Rights Watch verified that between September 27 and October 12, 2020, Azerbaijani forces struck the field surrounding School Number 10, in Stepanakert. In addition to leaving deep craters in the schoolyard, the attacks caused significant damage to dozens of classrooms, windows, doors, school equipment, the exterior, and the water and electricity.<sup>331</sup>
- On October 3, 2020, three artillery shells struck School Number 1, in Tartar, causing significant damage to the walls, windows, and courtyard, as well breaking the windows of a neighboring kindergarten. Around 1,300 students attended the school before the hostilities.<sup>332</sup>
- Human Rights Watch verified that on October 6 and 7, 2002, Azerbaijani forces repeatedly used explosive weapons to attack a military compound in Stepanakert (Khankhendi), leading to the damage of nearby School Number 12. The blasts damaged approximately 40 windows in the school.<sup>333</sup>
- Human Rights Watch reported that on October 8, 2020, Armenian forces carried out rocket artillery attacks, striking School Number 4 in Ganja. The attack did not injure or kill any civilians.<sup>334</sup>
- The Azerbaijani Ministry of Education reported that on October 17, 2020, Armenian forces launched an attack on Ganja, during which Secondary School Number 29 suffered extensive damage. The attack took place in the night and no students were in attendance, but the incident reportedly affected 1,006 students who attend the school.<sup>335</sup>
- Human Rights Watch received reports that shelling, including Grad artillery rockets fired by Azerbaijani forces, struck Martuni School Number 2, in Martuni (Khojavend) multiple times between October 1 and 15, 2020, on October 19, 2020, and again on November 8, 2020. The shelling also affected a kindergarten and art and music school.<sup>336</sup>

### ***Military use of schools and universities***

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA received several reports of military use of schools by both Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, de facto Nagorno-Karabakh security forces, and Russian peacekeepers.<sup>337</sup> Some cases of military use occurred after the November 2020 ceasefire. These included the following:

- A school principal reported to *The Armenian Mirror Spectator* on November 27, 2020, that Armenian forces had used two schools in Berzdor (called Lachin in Azerbaijan) beginning around October 19, 2020. In School Number 1, the principal reported that around 300 Armenian soldiers had used the school as barracks and had caused damage to the facilities. The school reportedly served 220 students.<sup>338</sup> Armenia controlled Lachin district until the end of November, according to media reports.<sup>339</sup>
- On November 8, 2020, Human Rights Watch observed an Azerbaijani military truck stationed behind School Number 1 in Tartar.<sup>340</sup>
- Human Rights Watch verified that on November 10, 2020, de facto Nagorno-Karabakh security forces were stationed inside a school and adjacent kindergarten in Martuni (Khojavend). The unit kept military vehicles and weapons on the school's grounds before vacating on December 19, 2020.<sup>341</sup>
- Human Rights Watch received reports that Russian peacekeepers entered a schoolyard in Martakert (called Aghdara in Azerbaijan) on January 20, 2021, while conducting military training while stationed at a neighboring stadium. The peacekeepers, who had not given the school advanced notification of their military drills, drove into the schoolyard in an armored vehicle and opened fire. The peacekeepers later provided new windows to

the school to replace ones that were damaged by shelling.<sup>342</sup>

### Attacks on higher education

During the reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three reported incidents of attacks on university students. These attacks occurred outside the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and involved the excessive use of force by police against university student protesters. These included:

- On June 1, 2020, Scholars at Risk reported that police arrested at least six students from student organizations who had gathered in front of the Ministry of Education to demand that authorities cancel exams due to inequitable access to higher education during Covid-19 closures. Police fined five students for violating quarantine mandates, before they were released.<sup>343</sup>
- On February 1, 2021, police detained four students of Lankaran State University, in Lankaran, who were protesting in front of the campus about exam scores, according to Scholars at Risk and local media.<sup>344</sup>
- Scholars at Risk and *BBC* reported that on May 3, 2021, police arrested around five students of Azerbaijan State Economic University, in Baku. The students, who belonged to an activist group, were protesting a new university exam policy.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Asena Karaçaltı and Josh Satre, “Civilians Under Fire in Nagorno-Karabakh: September-November 2020,” ACLED, December 7, 2020. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, January 2021), Armenia Chapter. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, January 2021), Azerbaijan Chapter.

<sup>342</sup> For example: Resolution 884 (1993) / adopted by the Security Council at its 3313th meeting, on 12 November 1993.

<sup>343</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), “Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War,” Briefing No. 91, ICG, December 22, 2020.

<sup>344</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021*, Armenia Chapter. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, Azerbaijan Chapter.

<sup>345</sup> “Armenia: Unlawful Rocket, Missile Strikes on Azerbaijan,” Human Rights Watch report, December 11, 2020. “Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh,” Human Rights Watch report, December 11, 2020. “Armenia: Cluster Munitions Used in Multiple Attacks on Azerbaijan,” Human Rights Watch news release.

<sup>346</sup> Amnesty International. *In the Line of Fire: Civilian Casualties from Unlawful Strikes in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh*, p. 5.

<sup>347</sup> “UNICEF statement on one month of fighting in and beyond Nagorno-Karabakh,” UNICEF press release, October 28, 2020.

<sup>348</sup> *AFP*, “Half of Nagorno-Karabakh population displaced by Armenia and Azerbaijan clashes,” *The Guardian*, October 8, 2020. “Armenia Foreign Minister: Over 90,000 displaced in Karabakh,” *PanArmenian*, October 24, 2020.

<sup>349</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), “Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War,” Briefing No. 91, ICG, December 22, 2020.

<sup>350</sup> Asena Karaçaltı and Josh Satre, “Civilians Under Fire in Nagorno-Karabakh: September-November 2020,” ACLED, December 7, 2020.

<sup>351</sup> “Regional Overview: Central Asia and the Caucasus 17-23 April 2021,” ACLED, April 29, 2021. “Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Artsakh Condemns the Enemy’s Firing of the Settlements of Artsakh,” Republic of Artsakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs news release, April 22, 2021.

<sup>352</sup> “Azerbaijan considering issues of regional schools damaged during Karabakh War,” *Azer News*, January 24, 2021.

<sup>353</sup> “More than 24 thousand children from Artsakh do not attend school. The aftermath of the war unleashed by Azerbaijan,” *Lurer*, October 15, 2020.

<sup>354</sup> Julia Hahn, “Civilians suffer amid Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 26, 2020. Anadolu Agency, “Azerbaijani civilians close to conflict zones take shelter in schools, public buildings” *Daily Sabah*, October 8, 2020.

<sup>355</sup> Andrew Connelly, “The humanitarian fallout of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 5, 2020.

<sup>356</sup> The Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, “Ad Hoc Report on the Children Rights Affected by the Azerbaijani Attacks against the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh),” Republic of Artsakh, November 9, 2020, p.10.

Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, “Lessons of War: Attacks on Schools During the Nagorno-Karabakh War,” Human Rights Watch, September 8, 2021.

<sup>357</sup> “Azerbaijan considering issues of regional schools damaged during Karabakh War,” *Azer News*, January 24, 2021. Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, “Lessons of War.”

<sup>358</sup> Information received by an international NGO respondent via email in September 2021. See also: “UNICEF statement on one month of fighting in and beyond Nagorno-Karabakh,” UNICEF press release, October 28, 2020.

<sup>359</sup> “Schools of Armenia’s Sotk, Kut communities damaged by Azerbaijan drone attacks,” *News.am*, October 19, 2020. Information received from an international NGO respondent via email in September 2021.

<sup>330</sup> A full list of references can be found on GCPEA's website, [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2022\\_references.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf)

<sup>331</sup> "Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh," Human Rights Watch news release, December 11, 2020.

<sup>332</sup> Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War."

<sup>333</sup> "Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh," Human Rights Watch news release.

<sup>334</sup> "Armenia: Unlawful Rocket, Missile Strikes on Azerbaijan," Human Rights Watch, December 11, 2020.

<sup>335</sup> "Yet another school destroyed as a result of the Armenian attack," Ministry of Education, Republic of Azerbaijan news release, October 17, 2020.

<sup>336</sup> "Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Providing Direct Assistance to the People of Artsakh," *Massis Post*, November 26, 2020. Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War."

<sup>337</sup> Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War." Aram Arkun, "Armenians Evacuate Kashatagh/Lachin District Including Berdzor and Tekeyan School," *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, November 27, 2020. Amalia Margaryan, "Hadrut High School Principal, Teachers Left Unemployed; Some Think of Returning to Artsakh," *Hetq*, December 4, 2020.

<sup>338</sup> Aram Arkun, "Armenians Evacuate Kashatagh/Lachin District Including Berdzor and Tekeyan School," *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, November 27, 2020.

<sup>339</sup> AFP, "'This is our life': Armenians flee before Azerbaijan arrives," *Radio France Internationale*, November 30, 2020.

<sup>340</sup> Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War."

<sup>341</sup> Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War."

<sup>342</sup> Bill Van Esveld and Tanya Lokshina, "Lessons of War."

<sup>343</sup> *Open Caucasus Media; Turan Information Agency*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID AZE14519. Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Baku State University, June 1, 2020.

<sup>344</sup> "A student protesting in front of Lankaran State University was detained (Lənkəran Dövlət Universiteti önündə etiraz edən tələbə saxlanılıb)," *Mikroskop*, February 1, 2021. *Meydan TV*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID AZE17148. Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Monitor, Lankaran State University, February 1, 2021.

<sup>345</sup> Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Monitor, Azerbaijan State Economic University, May 3, 2021. "Police in Baku intervened in a student protest (Bakıda polis tələbələrin aksiyasına müdaxilə edib)," *BBC*, May 3, 2021. *Jam News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID AZE17216.