

Grim Prospects for Refugee Children

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Azeri refugee in Baku worries about her boys' future, saying even if they were to return home they wouldn't fit in.

The Nasirov family's life has improved since they were driven from their homes in the Karabakh war, but only in as far as they now have their own toilet.

Exactly 15 years after a ceasefire was signed to end the conflict, the four family members still live cramped into a 30 square metre apartment in the former changing rooms of Baku's 2nd Railway Lycee.

Ilyas Nasirov had high-ranking jobs in trade unions and the communist party before the Soviet Union collapsed and he was forced to leave his home region of Jabrail, which is not technically part of Karabakh but remains occupied by Armenian forces.

Now, he drives a taxi.

"Sometimes for days at a time, not a single client comes. It's clear the world economic crisis has hit the purses of the people," he said when IWPR visited him in his home.

"When we moved here, there was one toilet for 20 families. Can you imagine the sight of it? Every morning there was a long queue outside."

Since then, he clubbed together with his neighbours to divide up a communal balcony, where they built small bathrooms. But there is still no proper kitchen. Nasirov's wife Khalida said everyone cooked in the corridor on small gas stoves.

"In Jabrail, I had a two-storey house, with all conveniences, a garden, a patch of ground. Now I have none of that. I very much want to return to my home," said Ilyas, who said he still believes that Azerbaijan will one day regain control of its lost territories.

The couple's oldest son Elbeyi was out when IWPR called. He is unemployed and was looking for work. His younger brother Elgyun is studying in the university, with the free tuition received by refugees. Khalida said the family lives on the 15.60 US dollars they receive each month as refugees, and the 104 dollars she personally receives as registered invalid.

"My children have absolutely no prospects," said Khalida. The family did not feel at home in Baku, but she doubted they would fit in if ever they won the chance of going back to their village.

"My sons have practically never seen their home region. They've lived and grown up in the city. I don't think that after all this time they'll be able to adapt to life in the country."

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Location: Karabakh
Azerbaijan

Topic: Special Report: Karabakh Refugees

Focus: Caucasus

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/grim-prospects-refugee-children>