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Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Azerbaijan has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 23 October. It was issued on 23rd October 2008.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy.
- iii For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Azerbaijan is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- xi The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI) was established in 2003 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the UKBA's country of origin information material. The APCI reviewed a number of UKBA's reports and published its findings on its website at www.apci.org.uk. Since October 2008, the work of the APCI has been taken forward by the Chief Inspector of UKBA.

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2. Background information on Azerbaijan

Full Country Name: The Republic of Azerbaijan

Population: 8.5 million

Capital City: Baku 2.0 million

People: Predominantly Turkic Azeri, Russian 8%, Armenian 6%.

Languages: Azeri 89%, Russian 3%, Armenian 2%, other 6%

Religion(s): Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5 %, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%, other 1.8%

Currency: Manat

Major Political Parties: New Azerbaijan Party, Azerbaijan Democratic Party, Popular Front Party (Reformists), Musavat, Liberal Party and Azerbaijan National Independence Party.

Government: Republic

Head of State: President Ilham Aliiev

Prime Minister/Premier: Artur Rasizade

Foreign Minister: Elmar Mamadyarov

Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: BSEC, CCC, CE, CIS, EAPC, EBRD, ECE, ECO, ESCAP, FAO, IBRD, ICAO, ICRM, IDA, IDB, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, Intelsat, Interpol, IOC, ISO (correspondent), ITU, NAM (observer), OIC, OPCW, OSCE, PFP, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO (observer) (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008) [4a]

The majority of Azerbaijan's population is Shia Muslim. There are ethnic and cultural links with the large ethnic Azeri population of Iran. Azerbaijan's system of government is secular, and the country has a westward-looking foreign policy. (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008) [4a]

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GEOGRAPHY

Azerbaijan is the largest of the three South Caucasus states, bounded by Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Iran and the Caspian Sea. There is also a short border between Turkey and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic (pop. 295,000), which is separated from the bulk of Azerbaijan by southern Armenia. Under Russo-Turkish treaty arrangements Nakhichevan's sovereignty cannot be transferred from Azerbaijan. (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008). [4a]

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MAPS

Map of Azerbaijan, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book, accessed 29 September 2008 [10b]

Map of Azerbaijan, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, accessed 29 September 2008 [27a]



Map courtesy of CIA World Fact Book [10a]



Map courtesy of Institute for War and Peace reporting [27a]

RECENT HISTORY

"In 1988, when Azerbaijan was still part of the Soviet Union, the predominantly ethnic Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) adopted a resolution seeking the transfer of N-K to Armenia. The resolution was rejected by the USSR and Soviet troops deployed to N-K to suppress nationalist sentiments. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1989, N-K declared its independence. Azerbaijani forces then attempted to re-establish control but met fierce resistance. In 1992 N-K forces captured Shusha (a previously Azeri-populated town within N-K) and established a corridor to Armenia through Lachin. In 1993 N-K forces, with help from Armenia, retook northern N-K and occupied the entire south-west corner of Azerbaijan, some 20% of Azerbaijani territory. This encroachment onto Azerbaijan's territory led to wide-scale international condemnation, including four UN Security Council Resolutions demanding that 'local Armenian forces' withdraw from the most recently occupied areas outside N-K."

"Intense fighting in April 1994 was followed by a cease-fire in May 1994, brokered in direct talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, consolidated by agreement in July 1994. With the exception of minor violations the cease-fire has held. Armenia, Azerbaijan and the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have all confirmed their readiness to continue it indefinitely until a political agreement is concluded. The number of deaths in the conflict probably exceeded 15,000 with at least 900,000 Azerbaijanis and 300,000 Armenians displaced." (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008). [4a]

See section on [Nagorno-Karabakh](#)

"Outstanding issues in dispute include the future political status of NK and the nature of any international guarantees of that status. Armenia points to a 1991 referendum (ruled illegal by the Government of Azerbaijan) in which the people of NK voted for independence. The Armenian Parliament refuses to accept any solution to the conflict which refers to NK as part of Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan has annulled NK's former autonomous status." (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008). [4a]

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Azerbaijan Presidential elections- 15 October 2008

"Azeri President Ilham ALIEV won a landslide victory in the October 15 presidential election, winning 89 percent of the vote according to preliminary results. Azerbaijan's principal opposition parties boycotted the vote, arguing that participation was pointless given government curbs on democracy and media freedom, leaving ALIEV to compete against six independent and little known candidates. OSCE election monitors concluded that while the poll 'marked considerable progress,' it did not reflect all principles of a meaningful democratic election. OSCE monitors reported concerns regarding a lack of electoral competition and limits on media freedom. Most troubling, the observers noted, were shortcomings "during the crucial phase of vote counting tabulation." (IFES Election Guide, Posted: 16 October 2008) [50]

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ECONOMY

GDP: US\$ 19.9bn (2006)

GDP per capita: US\$ 1,041 (2005)

Annual Growth: 34.5% (2006) and 41.7% 1st quarter 2007

Inflation: 8.3% 2006 and 16.7% 1st quarter 2007

Exchange rate: 0.86 Manat (at 15 May 2007) (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008) [4a]

Azerbaijan's economy suffered large shocks from the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, which disrupted trade routes and markets, and the drain on resources caused by the N-K war effort. Buoyancy in the oil market has eased the pressure. 2006 showed record growth in the economy.

Growth is being fuelled by investment in Azerbaijani oil reserves. The State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan grew from US\$692 million on 1 January 2003 to US\$1,338 million by 1 February 2007. Inflation over the same period has continued to increase significantly and is currently running at 16.7%.

Approximately 47% (2004) of people are estimated to live below the poverty line. The Government of Azerbaijan adopted a Poverty Reduction and Development Plan in October 2002 and redesigned it in 2004. The new Poverty Reduction and Development Plan will run from 2006-2015. The programme focuses on poverty reduction...

Corruption is a serious problem. In 2007, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked the Azerbaijan 150 out of 179. However, the Government has recently signed a number of international agreements designed to tackle corruption and in January 2005 it established a Commission to fight corruption. (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008) [4a]

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3. Human rights

OVERVIEW

The United States Department of State 2007 Country Report on Human rights practices in Azerbaijan published 11 March 2008 stated that:

“The government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in some areas. The public's right to peacefully change the national legislature was restricted in the 2005 parliamentary elections, although there were some improvements in the period leading up to the elections and in the May 2006 parliamentary election reruns that took place in 10 parliamentary constituencies. Torture and beating of persons in police and military custody resulted in four deaths, and law enforcement officials acted with impunity. Prison conditions--despite continuing improvements in infrastructure--were generally harsh and life threatening. Arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly of individuals considered by the government to be political opponents, and lengthy pretrial detention continued. The government continued to imprison persons for politically motivated reasons. Pervasive corruption in the judiciary and in law enforcement continued. Restrictions on freedom of assembly continued. Restrictions and pressure on the media and restrictions on political participation worsened. The government imposed restrictions on the activities of some unregistered Muslim and Christian groups. Cases of violence against women also were reported.” [2a]

In the FCO Country profile last updated 14 April 2008 it was noted that “Azerbaijan had ratified in 1992 the Convention on Rights of the Child, in 1995 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, in 1996 International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In addition to signing these international conventions in February 1998 Azerbaijan also signed the Abolition of the death penalty and in August 1998 removal of censorship; regular amnesties for prisoners. In June 2002 Establishment of an Ombudsman's Office; Establishment of a Constitutional Court Dec 2002 Former President Heydar Aliiev signed the Constitutional Law on Regulating the Exercise of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Azerbaijan Republic (the 'Constitutional Law'). The object of the law was to bring into correspondence with the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) the exercise of human rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan.” (FCO Country Profile, last updated 14 April 2008) [4a]

The Amnesty International, Annual Azerbaijan Human Rights report 2008 covering events of 2007 reported that:

“There were persistent reports of the use of torture or other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials. In June, the Court of Grave Crimes sentenced teenagers Dmitri Pavlov, Maksim Genashilkin and Ruslan Bessonov, accused of murdering another teenager, Vüsal Zeynalov, to 10 years' imprisonment after a trial characterized by serious irregularities. Law enforcement agents reportedly intimidated human rights defenders, and in one case, failed to intervene to protect an NGO from intimidation. The authorities continued to extradite people despite risk of torture or other ill-treatment... In another case, people were deported without being given access to appeal procedures.” [11a]

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POLICE ABUSE OF SUSPECTS AND DETAINEES

The US Department of State report dated 11 March 2008 notes that, “The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of National Security are responsible for internal security and report directly to the president. The Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees local police forces and maintains internal civil defence troops. The Ministry of National Security has a separate internal security force.

Arbitrary arrest, often on spurious charges of resisting the police, remained a problem throughout the year. The law allows police to detain and question individuals for 24 hours without a warrant; in practice police detained individuals for several days, sometimes weeks, without a warrant. In other instances, the prosecutor general issued ex post facto warrants. The law provides for access to a lawyer from the time of detention; in practice access to lawyers was poor, particularly outside of Baku. Although provided for by law, indigent detainees did not have access to lawyers. Authorities often restricted family member visits and withheld information about detainees; frequently days passed before families could obtain any information about detained relatives. There was no formal, functioning bail system... Lengthy pretrial detention of up to 18 months was a serious problem.

Law enforcement corruption was a problem. Police often levied spurious, informal fines for traffic and other minor violations and extracted protection money from local residents. In 2005 and again in 2006, traffic police officers received substantial pay raises to counter corruption; nevertheless, the low wages of other law enforcement officials continued to contribute to police corruption.” (USSD 2007, 11 March 2008) [2a]

PRISON CONDITIONS

“Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening despite continuing prison infrastructure improvements. Overcrowding, inadequate nutrition, and poor medical care combined to make the spread of infectious diseases a serious problem. Despite recent improvements to prison infrastructure, prisons, generally Soviet-era facilities, did not meet international standards. In maximum-security facilities, authorities limited physical exercise for prisoners as well as visits by attorneys and family members. Some pretrial detainees were reportedly held in separation cells, often located in basements, to conceal evidence of physical abuse and where food and sleep reportedly were denied to elicit confessions.

Harsh prison conditions resulted in numerous deaths during the year; the Justice Ministry reported that 122 persons died in detention during the year, a 5.4 percent decrease from the number of deaths in detention in 2006. According to the ministry, 116 persons in detention died from natural causes, 96 of which occurred at medical facilities; three committed suicide; and three were killed by other prisoners. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported two deaths at ministry detention facilities during the year, but stated that investigations were conducted, and the official cause of death in both instances was suicide. The ministry dismissed four police officers and took disciplinary action against seven police officers for negligence in connection with the deaths.” (USSD 2007, 11 March 2008) [2a]

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TRAFFICKING

“Azerbaijan was primarily a source and transit point for women, men, and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Central Asian, Russian, and local women and girls were trafficked from or through the country to the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, India, and Pakistan for exploitation in the sex industry. Men were trafficked to Russia for forced labour. Although there were no official reports of internal trafficking, domestic monitors reported a growing trend of internal trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, of men for forced labour in the construction industry, and of children for begging. During the year the government reported it identified 101 trafficking victims, one of which was a case of child trafficking. Traffickers generally targeted women.

During the year 85 persons were prosecuted under the law against trafficking in persons, and one person was convicted of document forgery in a trafficking-related case. Most trafficking-related crimes prosecuted during the year carried maximum penalties between five and 12 years' imprisonment, except for rape and sexual violence, which both carried maximum 15-year prison sentences. There also are specific criminal penalties for enslaving, raping, and forcing children into prostitution. During the year the government opened 88 criminal investigations resulting in 86 convictions of individuals charged with trafficking-related crimes. At year's end, 13 criminal investigations remained open...There was no standardized mechanism to return trafficked women to the country. According to the IOM, some Azerbaijanis and third-country nationals who were either victims of trafficking or engaged in prostitution were deported to the country, primarily from Turkey. However, the government had no program to assist them.” (USSD 2007, 11 March 2008) [2a]

“The Government of Azerbaijan does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Azerbaijan is placed on Tier Two Watch List for its failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons, particularly efforts to investigate, prosecute and punish traffickers, to address complicity among law enforcement personnel, and to adequately identify and protect victims in Azerbaijan. Although the government-funded shelter housed an increased number of trafficking victims in 2007, Azerbaijan has yet to develop a much-needed mechanism to identify potential trafficking victims and refer them to safety and care. Poor treatment of trafficking victims in courtrooms continues to be a problem.” (USSD 2008, Trafficking in Persons) [2d]

ETHNIC GROUPS

“Some of the approximately 20,000 citizens of Armenian descent living in the country historically have complained of discrimination in employment, schooling, housing, the provision of social services, and other areas. Citizens who were ethnically Armenian often concealed their ethnicity by legally changing the ethnic designation in their passports.

Some groups reported sporadic incidents of discrimination, restrictions on the ability to teach in their native languages, and harassment by local authorities. These groups included Talysh in the south, Caucasian Lezghins in the north, displaced Meskhetian Turks, and displaced Kurds from the Lachin region, controlled by Armenia-supported Nagorno-Karabakh separatists.” (USSD 2007, 11 March 2008) [2a]

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4. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1a]	Europa World Online Country Profile, Location, Climate, Language, Religion, Flag, Capital (accessed 29 September 2008) http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=az&go_country=GO
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007, Azerbaijan, published 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100548.htm
	[4a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Azerbaijan, updated 14 April 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/europe/azerbaijan/?profile=all
	[4b]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Human Rights Annual Report 2007 published March 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/human-rights-report-2007
	[5a]	Human Rights Watch World Report 2008, events of 2007: Azerbaijan http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/azerba17742.htm
	[7a]	BBC News, Country Profile: Azerbaijan, Last updated 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235976.stm
	[7b]	BBC News, Timeline: Azerbaijan, published 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235740.stm
	[10a]	Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, Azerbaijan, last updated 4 September 2008 https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/aj.html
	[17a]	Ethnologue, Languages of the World, Languages of Azerbaijan - 2008 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AZ
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	[19a]	United Nations Cartographic Section, Map on Azerbaijan http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/english/htmain.htm
	[27a]	Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) – Caucasus Maps and Country Profiles: Map of Caucasus http://www.iwpr.net/index.php?apc_state=henocrslocal_caucasus/caucasus_programme_index.html&s=o&o=caucasus_map.html
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	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007, Azerbaijan, published 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100548.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Azerbaijan, last updated May 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2909.htm
	[4a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Azerbaijan, updated 14 April 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/europe/azerbaijan/?profile=all
	[7a]	BBC Country Profile: Azerbaijan, Last updated 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235976.stm
	[7b]	BBC Timeline: Azerbaijan, published 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235740.stm
	[25a]	Freedom in the World 2008: Azerbaijan http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7346
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	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007, Azerbaijan, published 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100548.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Azerbaijan, last updated May 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2909.htm#gov
	[4a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Azerbaijan, updated 14 April 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/europe/azerbaijan/?profile=all
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	[7a]	BBC Country Profile: Azerbaijan, Last updated 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235976.stm
	[7b]	BBC Timeline: Azerbaijan, published 3 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1235740.stm
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	[5a]	Human Rights Watch World Report 2008, events of 2007: Azerbaijan http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/azerba17742.htm
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	[2d]	United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/105387.htm
	[3a]	The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Azerbaijan at a glance http://www.unicef.org/azerbaijan/about_2976.html
	[28a]	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: Concluding Observations, Azerbaijan, 17 March 2006 http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher.CRC.CONCOBSERVATIONS,AZE,45377ed20,0.html
	[28f]	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Azerbaijan Child

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