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Armenia

Events of 2023

Ethnic Armenians, who have fled from Nagorno-Karabakh, in a tent in Goris, Armenia, October 1, 2023.

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The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the eventual influx into Armenia of more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians who fled the Azerbaijani enclave dominated events in the country in 2023.

While constitutional reforms stalled, authorities continued to pursue sectoral reforms with respect to the judiciary, police, disability rights, and education.

Human rights groups raised concerns over the efficacy of judicial reforms and impartiality of the accountability process for judges suspected of alleged infractions. They also criticized the lack of comprehensive police reforms.

Areas of continuing human rights concerns include ill-treatment of detainees by law enforcement, domestic violence, discrimination against people with disabilities, and violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Over 100,000 ethnic Armenians, almost the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, fled for Armenia in September following a military operation by Azerbaijan to regain full control over the enclave. Azerbaijan's military operation followed months of acute shortages of food, medication, hygiene products, and other essential supplies to the region due to Azerbaijan's

disruption of vehicular and pedestrian traffic between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh since December 2022. For more information, see the Azerbaijan chapter of this report.

Police Abuses and Impunity

Lack of effective accountability for law enforcement abuses is an ongoing problem. Authorities often pursue investigations into ill-treatment allegations under “abuse of office” offenses, which carry lighter penalties.

In [April 2023](#), during a drug prevention operation in Yerevan, police used disproportionate force against employees and visitors at a night club and briefly detained dozens of them. Several alleged that police and investigators ill-treated them based on their assumed or real sexual orientation and gender identity. Authorities initiated an abuse-of-power case against police, recognizing at least six people as victims, but no charges had been brought at time of writing.

In February, two lawyers representing a detained child reported that several officers physically assaulted them following an argument at a police precinct. Authorities charged two officers with the [criminal offense](#) of manhandling; the investigation was pending at time of writing.

In June, another [lawyer](#) alleged that police used physical violence against him and his client at a Yerevan police station. Authorities charged three officers with ill-treating the defendant, but they also charged the lawyer with hooliganism and hindering lawful police actions.

[In another case](#), Armenian law enforcement bodies dropped a criminal investigation into the April beating by a senior police officer of a 17-year-old child who was working as a waiter in a restaurant at the time. The prosecutor claimed that the perpetrator “fully regretted” his actions and apologized to the victim. Following public outcry, law enforcement bodies reopened the investigation, suspended the officer from active duty, and [charged](#) him with causing a child severe physical pain.

[In June](#), the independent Monitoring Group of Institutions for Children, Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities [reported](#) violence against children at a child support center and alleged that a police officer mistreated one of the children. Authorities did not investigate the allegations, claiming that the report did not include enough factual information.

Freedom of Expression and Information

Although defamation is decriminalized, politicians and private businesses often bring civil cases against journalists and media outlets, dragging them into lengthy legal battles, and threatening heavy financial penalties. A [local media advocacy group](#) reported that from January through September, media outlets faced 23 new defamation suits.

In March, parliament passed amendments establishing additional grounds for denying public information requests. Under the new regulation, an agency can refuse to provide information if it contains “official information of limited distribution,” vague language that opens the door to unwarranted censorship.

Disability Rights

Armenia lacks a comprehensive plan to introduce community-based services for people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities and continues to prioritize institutions and institutional care.

The government adopted a program on social inclusion of people with disabilities, which envisages the creation of eight small group homes and an independent living center and the expansion of in-

home services for people with disabilities.

In February, the authorities introduced a digital system to evaluate a person's "functionality," which uses an algorithm to determine disability status. In August, [a local disability rights group](#) filed a lawsuit against the state for failure to disclose the algorithm used for such determinations. They allege that the algorithm reflects a medical model of disability, which largely focuses on the person's medical condition, rather than the systemic barriers, derogatory attitudes, and acts of social exclusion that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying human rights on an equal basis with others.

Armenia allows courts to deprive people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities of legal capacity and offers no supported decision-making mechanisms. As of September, courts had received about 200 requests to strip individuals of legal capacity and did so in at least 109 cases; they restored legal capacity to one individual.

Violence against Women

Authorities [investigated 1,051](#) criminal domestic violence complaints through June, a significant increase over the 391 complaints investigated during the same period in 2022, and brought charges against 144 people. At least 12 women were killed between September 2022 and September 2023, 8 by a family member and 1 by a partner. Six of these women were over 60.

Armenia has only two shelters for domestic violence survivors, together having a capacity to shelter 24 women plus their children. According to the Women's Support Center, a local group, the shelters are continuously full, and protection of women remains ineffective and [marred](#) by court rulings invalidating police urgent intervention orders.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people continue to face discrimination, harassment, and violence.

LGBT people can apply for an exemption from military service, where they face homophobic harassment and violence. However, to do so, they must receive a "diagnosis" of "homosexuality" or "transsexualism," which is then registered in the unified healthcare electronic information system. According to [LGBT groups](#), this "diagnosis" can later expose them to discrimination when seeking healthcare services.

Fear of discrimination and humiliation due to public disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity continues to prevent many LGBT people from reporting hate crimes against them. According to [LGBT rights groups](#), investigations into such crimes are often inconclusive or ineffective and the charges brought often do not reflect the homophobic and transphobic motives of perpetrators: the Criminal Code does not explicitly recognize animus due to sexual orientation or gender identity as an aggravating circumstance in hate crimes cases.

Local LGBT rights groups and activists documented 37 cases of physical violence, including 17 cases of violence committed by family members from January through August 2023. The groups recorded 14 cases of psychological and economic violence and harassment by family members over the same period.

In a [positive move](#), Armenian authorities in December 2022 lifted a policy prohibiting men who have sex with men from donating blood.

Key International Actors

European Council President Charles Michel hosted meetings throughout 2023 with Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, discussing issues related to the Lachin corridor (the sole road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia), border delimitation, transport links, and the peace agreement that would also address the rights and security of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population. The [United States](#) also mediated several rounds of discussions between the Armenian and Azerbaijan foreign ministers aimed at reaching a “durable peace agreement.”

In February, the European Union [launched](#) the civilian mission in Armenia (EUMA), deploying 50 observers along the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan and aiming to contribute to stability, build confidence in conflict-affected areas, and ensure an environment “conducive to the normalisation efforts” between the parties.

In its November 2022 [Concluding Observations](#), the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged Armenia to ensure better representation of women in all branches of government, expedite adoption of a pending law on legal equality, and adopt a model of “substantive equality.” It also called on the authorities to eliminate persistent gender stereotypes within the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, criminalize all forms of gender-based violence against women, and ensure effective investigations into all cases of domestic violence.

The Committee also recommended that authorities take measures to combat discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex women and ensure that transgender people, including women, can change the gender marker in their passport and other identity documents.

The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries conducted its [first visit to Armenia](#) in February 2023.

During the June EU-Armenia Partnership Committee, the EU [highlighted](#) the importance of an independent and efficient judiciary and the fight against corruption. It also called on Armenian authorities to make additional efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

In its March resolution on EU-Armenia relations, the European Parliament [condemned](#) the blockage of the Lachin corridor and highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. It also called on Armenia to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and improve human rights protections, especially for women and minorities, including LGBT people.

In October, Armenia's parliament voted to ratify the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court.