

Azerbaijani Georgians appeal to Aliyev to open border

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Over a thousand people, mostly Georgian ethnic Azerbaijanis, have signed an online petition calling on Azerbaijan's President, Ilham Aliyev to restore at least limited movement across the Georgian-Azerbaijani land border.

The petition was launched by Samira Bayramova, a civil activist based in Marneuli, southern Georgia.

Georgia's population of ethnic Azerbaijanis numbers [more than 230,000](#), constituting the largest (6%) ethnic minority group in Georgia, most living in the southeast of the country.

Azerbaijan's land and sea borders with Georgia, Russia, Iran, and Turkey have been closed for both citizens and foreign nationals for over three years, since March 2020. Cargo shipments are, however, able to cross the border.

The official justification for the borders' closure remains combating the spread of COVID-19, despite other anti-pandemic measures, including the use of face masks and COVID-19 passports, have long been rescinded. Neither a COVID-19 test nor evidence of vaccination is required to enter Azerbaijan by air.

Georgia reopened its land borders for those who had been fully vaccinated or received a negative PCR test as early as May 2021.

The text of the petition states that the borders' ongoing closure has had 'a very negative effect' on people, obstructing cross-border economic activities and cutting ties with relatives residing in Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government last extended the border closures in late June, extending the 'special quarantine regime' until 2 October. This effectively kept air travel — chiefly [through](#) Azerbaijani air operators AZAL and Buta Airlines — as the only available connection, an unaffordable option for many.

The decision came over three months after the World Health Organisation [announced](#) the end of the global health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

'The notoriously high cost of current airlines is unaffordable and limiting for thousands of disadvantaged individuals', asserts the petition. 'Elderly people are particularly unable to use air travel, or it is too risky and difficult for them'.

The petition does not demand that the border restriction be fully lifted, instead asking that 'opportunities' be created for some groups to cross the land border 'in an alternative form'.

'We ask you to create this alternative for Azerbaijanis living in Georgia and Georgians living in Azerbaijan, as well as Georgian Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan and Georgian citizens of Azerbaijan living in Georgia, because unlike the citizens of other countries, the peoples living in Georgia and Azerbaijan are united by family relations and bonds', the petition requests.

Many citizens of Azerbaijan have been significantly affected by the ongoing closure of the country's borders, including those who struggled to enter from Russia in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Some have also noted that reopening the country's land border with Georgia would help Azerbaijani nationals based in Turkey, including students studying there, to return home through the Georgia-Azerbaijan crossing points at Red Bridge, Dadakhlo (Sadikhli), and Balakan.

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