

Sector: PROTECTION

Organizations: Protection Working Group (PWG) consists of representatives from 31 organizations, such as UN agencies, international organizations, international and local NGOs, and the Human Rights Defender's Office, which was invited in the auspice of its special mandate focused on human rights protection

1) Needs Overview

Needs assessments and protection monitoring findings have indicated that the main needs of the population in refugee-like situation in Armenia¹ are essentially related to shelter, cash and food. From the onset of emergency, the Government has entrusted municipalities with the responsibility to respond and assist the refugee-like population from Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), which were largely supported by private donors (including from diaspora) during the initial emergency response. As a result, majority of persons in refugee-like situation were received by hosting communities and provided with basic support. However, a mid and long-term strategy for assistance programmes is necessary, also to ensure effective and durable protection, focused on community mobilization, self-reliance and resilience.

The main **protection needs** of persons of concern are:

- Timely and effective **identification and assistance to the most vulnerable categories** (unaccompanied/separated children, elderly persons without support, persons with disabilities, pregnant/lactating women, survivors of serious trauma, etc.), who require special attention and robust protection, social and legal support;
- More clarity is required on the **legal status and access to basic rights and services** to ensure effective, harmonized and equal access of the refugee-like population to health care, education, documentation, social protection and other basic rights and services without any delay and avoid any confusion in practice;
- **Improved access to information** about their rights, available services and existing assistance programmes as low awareness precludes them from receiving timely assistance and hinders their ability to protect their rights **and limits their resilience and self-reliance**.

Assistance programmes should focus on vulnerable people to ensure equal legal and practical access to available support. Protection monitoring has revealed that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and because the recent conflict has stretched capacity of the health facilities, access to qualified and timely **health care** and provision of medicines might be limited. Some targeted care and assistance should be considered in case of persons with disabilities (including children), people with serious diseases and survivors of serious trauma (including mental health).

Although there is willingness to provide educational support to all refugee-children, notably through preschool, secondary and higher education, the capacities of the **education system** are limited and additional support is required to ensure effective continuity of education with effective assistance (electronic devices, school supplies, clothes, etc.) and development of special education support.

State assistance programmes have been announced to provide blank and targeted financial assistance to the refugee-like population. In this regard, physical and technical capacity of the most vulnerable categories (elderly persons, persons with disabilities, etc) should be considered to ensure their effective and timely access, and provision of individual support should be arranged as required. Considering the upcoming winter season, severely damaged infrastructure in NK, inability of many of the refugee-like population to return home, particularly to the regions which have been handed over to Azerbaijan. It is important to draw special attention to **monitoring of return** concerning protection needs, counselling of those considering return on available assistance and conditions in NK, in particular in case of women and children at risk, persons with disabilities and elderly people without family support.

Legal aid and access to information is of vital importance, as people need information and support with documentation, but also how and where to apply for basic services and how to claim their rights to access the services. Often the lack of information and issues with documentation limit opportunities for immediate support to the families in need, as the potential verification and assessment of needs and the risk for potential duplications result in delayed and ineffective processes.

¹ The population in refugee like situation in Armenia (persons of concern) are those, who lived on the territory of Nagorno Karabakh (NK) conflict zone and had to spontaneously depart due to escalation of the conflict on 27 September 2020, as well as those residents of NK, who, due to various personal reasons, shortly travelled outside NK prior 27 September 2020 and now are not able to go back home due to the conflict there.

The host communities have been part of the response as they warmly welcomed the refugee-like population, sharing their accommodation and food, as well as offering other assistance (clothes, hygienic items, etc). According to various needs assessments and protection monitoring, at present, persons of concern **feel safe** and secure in their communities and **do not face any social cohesion issues**.

2) Population of concern

<i>Number of persons in need</i>	<i>Number of persons targeted by the sector</i>
<i>Some 90,000 persons in refugee-like situation from NK have been registered with the Migration Service since the onset of the conflict escalation. There are also reports that some 25,000-30,000 persons have returned after the ceasefire statement on 09 November 2020, but this number could not be verified, and according to some need assessments and monitoring, the sustainability of the return is still in question due to security concerns, harshly damaged infrastructure, and limited humanitarian assistance in NK.</i>	<i>Assisted Refugee-Like Population: 50,000 women, children and other persons with specific needs. Assisted Host Community population: 10,000 persons.</i>

3) Key priorities for interventions under this sector

1) 3 Strategic Objectives under the PWG:

- Refugee-like population, particularly the most vulnerable, have equal and effective access to rights and services and receive assistance and support.
- Communities, humanitarian actors and the relevant national authorities have the capacity to assess, analyse, prevent and address protection risks and needs.
- Social cohesion and resilience of the refugee-like population is improved and maintained.

2) The key priorities of the response under the PWG:

- **Protection mainstreaming** to incorporate protection principles, ensure collection of disaggregated data (age, gender, specific needs), and promote meaningful access, safety and dignity, accountability, participation and empowerment for all gender, age and diversity groups in all humanitarian projects, regardless of the sector, including safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian actors.
- **Protection monitoring** with primary focus on the most vulnerable persons.
- **Awareness raising and dissemination of information** to prevent the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and exploitation and facilitate access and enjoyment of rights and services.
- **Provision of effective, efficient and targeted assistance** and support through effective referrals or direct assistance through social and legal counselling and other humanitarian response programmes.
- Strengthening **the capacity and communication with communities and community-based protection mechanisms** with support from trained volunteers, as well as capacity development of service providers.
- **Harmonized and evidence-based advocacy** to strengthen protection and guarantee access to rights and services.
- Activities to **reinforce resilience and support durable solutions**.

4) Response Strategy at Working Group Level

This response strategy will be implemented in close coordination and collaboration with all members of the Protection Working Group to ensure comprehensive coverage and complementarity of our humanitarian efforts and have strategic, cost-effective, efficient and accountable humanitarian response. This strategy will be implemented in close cooperation with the government and other relevant authorities at the national and local level to guarantee effective support to all state programmes and initiatives concerning persons of concern.

Protection mainstreaming and vulnerability assessments: With full understanding of the gender and age impacts of the conflict and recognizing some specific needs of vulnerable categories, all activities will ensure collection of gender, age, and other specific (disability, survivors of trauma, etc.) breakdown for better analysis of needs of different groups of affected men and women, boys and girls. Consultations and feedback with different groups of men and women, boys and girls, will take place to develop targeted assistance programmes, as well as deliver and monitor protection interventions. Capacitation of all humanitarian partners on protection principles to ensure effective protection (GBV, exploitation, child protection) and meaningful access to assistance programmes.

Protection monitoring: coordinated and comprehensive monitoring of protection and human rights situation, return to NK and situation of returnees in NK (structured phone interviews) will be organized in cooperation with PWG members to (i) identify protection risks and gaps in assistance; (ii) assess the impact of assistance programmes and humanitarian response, including post-distribution monitoring, and relevant changes in policy and practice on the affected population on the local level; and (iii) assist evidence-based advocacy efforts for effective protection, including of the most vulnerable people, and ensure their access to rights.

Awareness raising and dissemination of information: the PWG will develop awareness raising strategy, initiate public awareness campaigns and design information materials for effective dissemination to ensure accessibility and comprehension, including in case of vulnerable persons. The primary focus will be on facilitation of access to services provided by national service providers and humanitarian actors on GBV, MHPSS, free legal aid; support the refugee-like population and host communities in enjoyment of rights by proactively informing them about available assistance programmes and changes in policies related to registration, freedom of movement, HLP (housing, land and property) rights and access to social benefits and pensions.

Provision of effective, efficient and targeted assistance: In cooperation and coordination with all PWG members, organize individual and group counselling on relevant protection needs and problems: (i) social and legal counselling, support and representation, including on documentation, HLP rights, access to basic rights and services; (ii) arranging psychosocial support, especially for children, parents, older people, people with disabilities and their caregivers; (iii) effective referrals for provision of safe spaces/shelters for GBV survivors and engage trained women and youth in more systemic peer support, coordination, and referral processes to prevent GBV/DV; and (iii) support finding shelter and other solutions for unaccompanied children, elderly people without family support and persons with disabilities. Moreover, support can be provided in the form of cash based interventions, which are complementary to government-led programmes, in alignment with national social protection measurements, eligibility criteria and standard SOPs, and supporting provision of basic income security and access to services of those in need. Targeted mental health and psychosocial support for different age and diversity groups tailored to the needs.

Communication with communities and community-based protection mechanisms: establish a network of volunteers in all communities, strengthen their capacity and engage them in monitoring of protection situation and identification of the most vulnerable people; develop community-based programmes focused on improvement of conditions and mobilization of resources within the refugee-like population and host communities, and provide capacity-building support to formal and informal community representatives and organisations, as well as service providers.

Harmonized, strong and evidence-based advocacy: based on the findings of protection monitoring and other needs assessments, develop an advocacy strategy for the PWG and ensure its harmonized implementation at all levels.

Activities to reinforce resilience and support durable solutions: the PWG will support the government with development of a strategic approach and assist the government with initiatives and programmes helping the refugee-like population with local integration, relocation or voluntary return in safety and dignity; as well as support for peace-building and social cohesion projects between host communities and the refugee-like population.

Effective implementation of this strategy will depend on the following factors:

- Effective collaboration and cooperation of the government and all relevant authorities at the national and local level, including in terms of access to the state registration process and data;
- Favourable political and socio-economic environment;
- Active participation and engagement of persons of concern and host communities at all stages of the strategy implementation;
- Availability of financial and other resources.

This strategy will be also implemented in collaboration and with active participation of host communities to support the local population with resolving existing protection problems and finding proper solutions to some systemic issues through relevant advocacy interventions (including advising the government on legal gaps and inconsistencies) and community-based programmes. Community-based projects will be developed considering available resources within the host community and focused on improvement of general protection environment and conditions.