

PROTECTION WORKING GROUP MEETING

MINUTES

10 AUGUST 2021

VENUE: Yerevan, ARMENIA (via MS Teams)

Participating organizations:

On 10 August 2021, 22 participants attended the twenty-third meeting of the Protection Working Group (PWG).

Meeting agenda:

- Updates by participating organizations.
- Presentation of departures monitoring and key informant dashboards (by UNHCR).
- Achievements of the PWG from November 2020 to June 2021 (by UNHCR).
- PWG Strategy and PWG ToR (suggestions from members, if any).
- Discussion on indicators for the PWG.
- Miscellaneous updates and issues.

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Umar Yakhyaev reminded that there was a decision made by UN to bring together UNHCR and UNICEF colleagues, separate child protection and education sub-working groups no longer exist, it was decided to have a thematic co-leading.

Updates by participating organizations

Mission Armenia NGO

- 60 children from Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) in Ararat and Kotayk received school supply packages funded by Pooled Funds in close partnership with Save the Children International.
- 5 families in Shirak marz received packages of kitchen items, this activity was funded by UMCOR Armenia.
- 688 food parcels were distributed among Persons of concern (PoCs) in Ararat, Kotayk marzes and the city of Yerevan. The activity was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, the lead partner was Actions Against Hunger.
- 23 parcels of winter clothes were distributed among POCs in Ararat, Kotayk, Yerevan with financial support of Aznavour Foundation.
- 100 boxes of baby kits were distributed in Ararat, Kotayk and Yerevan with financial support of GIZ.
- Mission Armenia lawyers provided legal counselling to 8 PoCs on terms and eligibility criteria for the Government cash assistance programme.
- Psychological counselling was provided to 106 PoCs in Gegharkunik marz.
- 50 PoCs underwent psychological needs assessment in Shirak Marz.
- 70 PoCs received psychological counselling and therapy in Shirak marz.
- MA is engaged in a project related to pregnant and lactating women and caregivers of children under 2 years old. 32 training sessions were conducted in Ararat, Kotayk and Yerevan (61 women participated in Ararat, 62 women in Kotayk and 90 women in Yerevan). This activity was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France in partnership with Actions Against Hunger.

Kasa Swiss Humanitarian Foundation

- The new collaboration with UNHCR was introduced: UNHCR hotline will be operated by Kasa, 3 or 4 operators will be engaged in the maintenance of the hotline, 1 of the operators will be a lawyer.
- Software solutions will be incorporated
- The hotline number was shared with the participants: 08000 0025.
- CRM system will be enriched
- During the next meeting updates will be provided regarding this project
- Partners will be contacted to share the information on the focal points

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Umar Yakhyaev further explained that the partner will implement the program/activity of the hotline to maintain impartiality and avoid conflict of interest of UNHCR and its partners. The activity will cover not only counselling-wise and referrals of the population UNHCR is serving in Armenia, but also conducting post distribution monitoring and recording complaints against UNHCR and/or its implementing partners' staff members. The importance of the component was highlighted. GBV and PSS components will also be referred. It was mentioned that UNHCR invites anyone who may potentially hear about misbehaviour of UNHCR and/or its partners to report directly to the hotline in order for UNHCR to make relevant decisions and follow-up according to the internal procedures.

Action Against Hunger

- The project funded by ECHO was presented. The duration of the project is 15 months covering child protection, mental health, psychological support, childcare assistance, legal aid in 10 multifunctional centres run by Mission Armenia and Partnership and Teaching NGO in Syunik. In the frame of the project, in collaboration with HALO Trust mine risk education will be implemented in the 43 schools in the borderline villages of Armenia, in Yerevan and in Kotayk as well. The project has already started.

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Umar Yakhyaev mentioned that their contacts will be included in service providers' mapping.

Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS)

- Updates were provided with regards to large-scale activity started in cooperation with UNHCR: in July 12 social workers were hired in 6 regions to conduct Protection Monitoring (PM) based on the questionnaire in KoBo toolbox developed by UNHCR.
- Case management procedure will start, it will be supervised by a special social worker, who will provide with initial mapping with possible amendments of the mapping for regions.
- PWG members were asked to provide the services they have now so that the social workers may refer to the special services.
- Hygiene items were provided funded by UNHCR. 4500 packages were distributed in 6 regions, this process will be finalised in 1-2 days. Some more batches of items are expected to be delivered from UNHCR.
- Joining the state cash support for displaced population from NK who are residing now in Armenia was one of the main activities implemented in July. ARCS supported 14,000 people with the support of UNHCR (68,000AMD per person). Almost all the disbursement of the cash is finalised, a few millions are left. Post distribution monitoring has already started. 500 families already participated in the survey, which showed that the money was spent on paying rents, utility bills, food and medicine.

Premiere Urgence Internationale (PUI)

- A training was organised for the psychologists of the partners on family supporting psychotherapy.
- PUI is trying to go out from Yerevan to Goris and Gyumri to start community-based approach by implementing resilience groups for adolescence. PUI is currently building the technical part: SOPs, guidelines for facilitations.

- “People in Need” NGO in Goris and “Arevamanuk” NGO in Gyumri will be among partners to implement the resilience groups and psychosocial support intervention for adolescents and their families.
- In September a mission will cover Gyumri, Syunik, Vardenis (Gegharkunik) to seek what can be done at the borders.
- A meeting with Woman Against Violence was conducted, technical support for the psychologists and social workers in Yerevan was discussed. The opportunity to provide MHPSS for GBV cases was discussed.

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Umar Yakhyaev highlighted the importance of PSS. The expansion beyond Yerevan was appreciated. Umar Yakhyaev proposed to link with ARCS who has a GBV or SGBV SOP, support with detailed PSS will be highly appreciated. Some individuals who may call to the Hotline may also be referred.

UNICEF Armenia

- The 3rd phase of the project funded by UK Conflict, Stability and Security fund has been approved and the actual implementation will start in 1-2 weeks. It has a big component on MHPSS and there are 3 target regions: Gegharkunik, Syunik and Vayots Dzor. They are negotiating with the donor to include other bordering communities as well, meaning Tavush, as Ararat was relatively peaceful in terms of escalations, however the practice shows that Ararat is also not guaranteed from escalations. Further negotiations will follow to expand the coverage of the project. All the colleagues involved in MHPSS will be informed.

UNHCR Armenia

- Protection missions were conducted of 1-week-long each to Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Tavush, Syunik and a specific border monitoring mission to Agarak (also called Meghri border crossing point with Iran).
- Cash assistance was provided with the help of ARCS
- UNHCR is working with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the United Social Services to provide rental subsidy to all the residents of collective shelters and transitional centres both state and privately owned. UNHCR is finalising some details, MoU is signed with the MLSA and the relevant activities are about to begin, either this week or in the beginning of next week. The main goal is to help the Government of Armenia but most importantly to help people in refugee-like situation to find more durable solution. This will be combined with relevant vocational skills training, income generating activities as well as distribution of income generation tools. Continuation of the Protection Monitoring with particular individuals who will be relocating from collective shelters will take place as well.
- During the last month UNHCR partners managed to begin, some of them managed to finish, large and small-scale projects: Peaceful Coexistence Projects and Community Support Initiatives respectively, implemented by partners in different regions of the country.
- UNHCR directly and through partners is providing relevant support to community-based organisations in different regions of the country with particular attention to bordering communities and newly emerging borders, in areas where there is a big number of people in refugee-like situation.
- The mid-year report on the Protection Monitoring is almost ready and will be shared by the end of the week
- To support Kasa, which will maintain the hotline on behalf of UNHCR, the service providers mapping is finalised. This will enable to easily refer relevant people to the services in different regions of the country.

Presentation of departures monitoring and key informant (KI) dashboards (by UNHCR)

- Starting from the beginning of July, the decision was made that 1 bus will depart with a capacity of 50 people. UNHCR continues monitoring the departure to identify the needs and protection concerns of the people departing from Armenia to NK.

- The priority needs shared by the key informants covering the entire country were presented. Key informants are the government officials, managers of collective shelters, representing or leading hosting communities, informally leading the refugee communities, living in transitional centers.
- According to KI interviews the need for livelihood and financial support is the highest priority, and then food and housing, land and property (issues with documentation, ownership, etc.) issues come. Shelter support is the 5th priority.
- The difference in expressed priority needs between KI interviews and individual protection monitoring is that according to the individual protection monitoring shelter support and financial support are higher than the rest of the needs.
- The percentages graphs were presented with regards to the availability and the quality of food, shelter, health, financial institutions and education.
- It was highlighted that as soon as the mid-year protection monitoring report, covering the period from January-June 2021 is ready, it will be first shared with PWG members.

Frederic Cussigh, Senior Inter-agency coordinator, UNHCR emphasised that it is interesting to see that there is a discrepancy between the 2 Protection Monitoring respondents. The monitoring conducted with the refugees themselves is the most accurate and representative. While if we have the key informant in charge of responding to the needs of refugees, it is their perception and political agenda bias may be present. It is equally important to hear both: the authorities and the refugees.

Achievements of the PWG from November 2020 to June 2021 (by UNHCR)

- The presented achievements cover the implementation by all the members of PWG.
- The targets set from the beginning of the response are reached, in some cases the targets were overreached.
- The information is available on UNHCR data portal.
- The members were invited to update the PWG 5W-s.

PWG Strategy and PWG ToR (suggestions from members, if any)

- UNHCR Senior Protection Officer, Umar Yakhyaev noted that the Inter-Agency Response Plan (IARP) has ended by the end of June; however, the needs are still there. The extension of the current IARP has been announced until the end of the year. There are some questions to decide, such as if there is a need to revise, change, amend or review the PWG Strategy and the ToR of the PWG. The colleagues were invited to change the views. One of the changes could/should be mentioning the current thematic co-leadership between UNICEF and UNHCR either in the PWG strategy or in the PWG ToR only.
- Marine Tunyan from Kasa agreed that the format should be changed suggesting a lighter version of the PWG Strategy and ToR.
- Umar Yakhyaev, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer mentioned that a meeting will be conducted with UNICEF to finalise the thematic co-lead.
- Frederic Cussigh, UNHCR Senior Inter-agency coordinator agreed that it is important to understand whether the strategy is still valid or there is a need to adapt. The importance of the budget updates was also highlighted. It is important to reconcile the information in RTF, where the donors have access. The extension is an opportunity for partners to have new projects related to protection, education, child protection or reconduct the projects which were not funded if they are still relevant, adapting to the current situation as the population has been reduced. The interagency response plan is overall 40 % funded, is the absolute essential tool where the donors look at to allocate fund to partners. The 97 % of the funds allocated to the refugee-like emergency response were allocated through the inter-agency response plan.
- Susanna Grigoryan, UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer, mentioned that each sub-working group had its own ToR, she suggested to incorporate the specific lines in sub-working group ToRs to the PWG basic ToR in order not to miss anything within those sub-groups. She also agreed that a lighter version of the ToR would be preferable.
- Frederic Cussigh stressed the urgency; the work is expected more than a month and needs to be ready in the next couple of weeks.

- UNHCR Senior Protection Officer proposed the following action plan: (i) Have a meeting with counterparts from UNICEF to discuss the need of a lighter versions of both the strategy and the combination of the ToRs of the 2 sub-working groups and the working group (ii) The members were asked to give their commitment to provide feedback within 72 hours after the updated versions are shared, so that it is finalised and shared with donors. It was emphasized that the needs are still there, the concerns and trends are raising, the part on MHPSS may be strengthened. It will not be a huge change of the strategy, as the situation did not change much, in some locations the concerns are raising due to the fact that there are some issues coming up in the bordering areas. The peaceful coexistence and peaceful cohabitation between people in refugee-like situation and the hosting community will be strengthened and, in case of success, a more sustainable solution to collective shelters will be found.

Discussion on indicators for the PWG.

- It was stressed that the adjustment of the indicators should be made later, so that all the partners and members easily comprehend them. UNHCR receives a number of questions with regards to 5Ws and the indicators as well and is ready to support the partners as soon as the PWG Strategy and the ToR are finalised.

Miscellaneous updates and issues

- UNHCR confirmed that the names of the colleagues interested in Workshop on 5Wswere shared with the Coordination unit, who will communicate the date/time of the workshop.
- The members were invited to visit the UNHCR data portal for updates related to PWG and approach UNHCR Senior Protection Officer or UNHCR Protection Assistant for additional information.

*UNHCR Armenia
August 2021*