

PROTECTION WORKING GROUP MEETING

MINUTES

30 NOVEMBER 2021

VENUE: Yerevan, ARMENIA (via MS Teams)

Participating organizations:

On 30 November 2021, 19 participants attended the twenty-sixth meeting of the Protection Working Group (PWG).

Meeting agenda:

- Updates by participating organizations.
- Presentation of snapshot protection monitoring report by UNHCR.
- Presentation of departure monitoring and key informant dashboards by UNHCR.
- Folding the IARP into the UNSDCF.
- Updates on the UNHCR hotline operation in partnership with KASA Foundation.
- Miscellaneous updates and issues.

Updates by participating organizations

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev expressed his special interest in the mission of UNICEF Armenia in Syunik province and gave the floor to UNICEF Climate Change Officer, Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan which the latter gladly accepted.

UNICEF Armenia

- Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan informed that UNICEF had conducted two missions in Syunik province in November, on the 18th-19th and the 22nd-24th of November 2021 respectively. During these missions there were visits to schools, municipalities especially in isolated communities as a result of road closures. The condition of schools, issues on possible displacement, safety and security were paid special attention.
- As the first mission mentioned above was not conducted by Mr. Shirvanyan himself, he noted that his colleagues Mr. Hayk Khemchyan and Ms. Alvard Poghosyan, who was to join a bit late because of competing priorities, would update on that.
- Mr. Shirvanyan continued to present on the 2nd mission mentioned above which he was part of. On 18-19 November UNICEF went to Davit Bek and Vorotan settlements. Davit Bek was a bordering village during the 44-day conflict and almost all the families had taken their children out of the village. As a result, the education, and the regular life of the community was harmed.
- Compared to schools in other communities, the one in Davit Bek settlement was in a good condition. At the same time work was being done in the direction to improve it and have a separate shelter. UNICEF was happy to see that the community found the URE project delivered by UNICEF quite useful along with school-in-a-box kits.

- The next stop was Vorotan where the main road passes by the borderline. To go to school, they have to take the alternative road which is not fully constructed yet. Because of that the right to free movement is restricted. Azeri militaries were seen from the school. Although children did not look stressed, it was obvious that the education process was affected. Out of 19 teachers, 14 come from Goris, who have to spend twice or trice more time each day to reach the school because of the road problem, let alone special vehicles needed. The school was not in a good condition.
- To assess the situation in the region, a reference to previous visits to Kapan was made, where no matter one takes the main road or the alternative road, before entering the city, on the left-hand bank side of the river, again Azeri military posts are placed.
- Mr. Hayk Khemchyan (UNICEF) continued to present on the 1st mission mentioned above which was conducted on the event of the World Children's Day and led by the newly appointed Representative of UNICEF Armenia. It was also the first opportunity between the Representative and partners to interact. The agenda of the mission, which was initially planned for 3 days, was reviewed because of hostilities at the moment.
- UNICEF current programs in the province were discussed with partners as well as children. Although it was not a needs assessment mission, it was an opportunity to get acquainted with the humanitarian needs and find ways to respond to the continued and unprecedented challenges in Syunik province.
- UNICEF has a long-lasting history of working with partners in Syunik, e.g., on parental education, mental health and psychosocial support, strengthening of health services, teachers' training, early childhood education, etc. The work in all these directions have been expanded with the help of donors in 2020-2021.
- Strength and determination of the society in the region was noticed: although both parents and children witnessed shootings during the recent military escalation, they looked careless. To have the overall picture civil society representatives, psychologists, social workers, different specialist were approached.
- One of the major findings was that there was a confirmation by all the above-mentioned specialists that psychosocial needs remain a top priority.
- An agreement was signed on the establishment of two new early learning centers in Tegh community which would allow children to learn and play and get ready for starting the primary school which is another top priority in all bordering villages of the province.
- Specialists continue to work with municipality so that the educational needs of children with disabilities are addressed, although efforts are not always successful.
- There was an ad-hoc courtesy meeting with the Governor.
- A visit was paid to Bardzravan village which aimed at observing the alternative road and the needs of the population. People used to take the main road from Goris to Kapan to go to Bardzravan settlement which was located 8km away from the main road. Although that road was not perfect, regular vehicles could use it.
- This time the 8-10km-long-road through Khot village was used which was a deviation from the main road and from there it took more than 20km to reach Bardzravan village. Although the road is newly constructed, it was a challenge to take it even for the big four-wheel vehicle. The road was full of water, mud, not easily

accessible for four-wheel vehicle, and probably not accessible at all for regular vehicles especially in this rainy and snowy season.

- On the way back from Bardzravan village the newly opened road through the forest was used which connected the village to the main alternative road that the Government refers to.
- So, the main alternative road from Goris to Kapan, though narrow and not ready for big trucks, is there, but the villages which are far from the main alternative road need secondary alternative roads to reach the main alternative road.
- In the tiny village of Bardzravan there were two families displaced from NK. The pre-school which was to be established with the support of UNICEF was visited. No major problems were observed in sense that there were not many services provided. For example, the kindergarten was on the second floor of the municipality building and children were taken home during the lunch time as there was no toilet, no water supply, no possibility to have a hot food. So, families cannot afford themselves to work until 5pm-6pm, as children need to be taken home. 6-7 children attend the kindergarten and 6-7 attend school respectively. Pupils from Shurnukh village used to attend the school in Bardzravan village as well, but now they have no access due to the road restrictions.
- Road restrictions deprive people from basic services. For example, a family who had a child with severe mental disability cannot afford themselves to take the child to nearby bigger communities for a professional support. Education is also suffered in sense that even proper devices are delivered, there is a connectivity issue.
- UNICEF plans to have visits to other villages as well, where the situation is anticipated to be even worse in terms of roads.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev addressed several questions and made some comments:
 1. During the visit of UNHCR SPO to Vorotan, the border guards had a station at the school building and promised to move out once their offices were ready and he inquired whether they were still there. UNICEF Climate Change Officer, Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan confirmed that border guards moved out. UNHCR SPO was happy to the news especially because UNHCR had provided them with some capacity-building and technical support in the framework of the regular support to strategic stakeholders from the government.
 2. It is mentioned by UNICEF that PSS is needed which is also confirmed by the protection monitoring of UNHCR conducted by its partner Armenian Red Cross Society NGO and the results are shared with the PWG members.
 3. UNHCR has made a decision to procure some equipment and some items for Tegh community to establish a sports pitch based on the nice experience in Goris, Armavir, Hrazdan and in a couple of other places where UNHCR built both a playground and sports pitch. Now UNHCR is in the process of a procurement of the items of the football pitch in Tegh community the need of which was raised by the representative of the community.
 4. UNHCR SPO expressed his delight to hear and also read in UNICEF press release that UNICEF gives additional support to some centers in Tegh community. For the sake of the well being of children, efforts from both sides are important.

5. UNHCR SPO inquired from UNICEF how many individuals there were in the families displaced from NK living in Bardzravan village to which Mr. Hayk Khemchyan (UNICEF) answered 8 persons, one household consisted of 2 elderly and the other one had 4 children one of whom was a student in Yerevan.

UNHCR SPO clarified that he inquired because starting from December 7, UNHCR was going to have a full presence in Verishen settlement which was on the way from Goris to Tegh. He wanted to pass that information to his protection colleagues at UNHCR to consider providing possible support in the framework of the activities of UNHCR and its partners if not this year, then next year. UNHCR SPO welcomed everyone to visit his colleagues at UNHCR office in "Mina" hotel while the reparation and administrative work of the official was still on. UNHCR would be happy to host and provide any relevant support.

6. UNHCR SPO inquired from UNICEF Climate Change Officer how they managed to cross the posts on M2 road to which the latter answered that they did not cross.

- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (Action Against Hunger) inquired whether UNICEF had an opportunity to visit the child friendly space established with the support of ACF at N1 school in Tegh community. UNICEF colleagues advised to write Ms. Alvard Poghosyan (UNICEF) anytime as the latter was present in the mission in Tegh community and would be able to answer.
- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (Action Against Hunger) praised UNHCR efforts to establish a football pitch in Tegh community which would provide children with more opportunities for their leisure time and physical activities especially when besides the school and kindergarten there was nothing else there.
- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (Action Against Hunger) appreciated that once an organization initiates smth in a borderline community, others join. She also referred ACF partner Partnership and Teaching NGO which started a project in Tegh community with UNDP funding. It gave internship opportunities to different specialists to be involved in different vacancies in the community. Taking that opportunity ACF child friendly space is enriched with a dance teacher and children can attend dance classes. ACF could witness their shining eyes during their mission.
- Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan added that UNICEF delivered DiaRem plans to N1 and N2 schools in Tegh community and developed it with the school management and teachers. They also received some supplies for emergency situation, like fire extinguishers, first aid kits, etc. Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF) said she saw them on her visit. She also added that disaster risk management plans should be developed and some operation plans should be on place in order to know how to act in emergency situations. As a follow up Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan (UNICEF) noted that trainings, including first aid trainings were organized for teachers and pupils along with distribution. As not all the communities are covered by now, UNICEF plans to have such trainings in 28 communities in Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces for the upcoming 3 months in the scope of United Kingdom Conflict, Stability and Security fund (UK CSSS fund).
- Mr. Hayk Khemchyan (UNICEF) concluded that UNICEF was going to have a meeting with its IPs within the UK funded project for mental health and phyco-social support, to discuss to what extent UNICEF can expand its presence in these communities or alternatively access to the services and capacity building

interventions implemented by UNICEF in Syunik province. Updates are said to be given in one of the next meetings.

- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev added that the above mentioned is in line with the proposed winding up of IARP and moving to the UNSDCF and thanked for taking it so much further. He also offered UNHCR support further in that because there would be the last winding down PWG meeting in December.

Action Against Hunger (ACF)

- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF) characterized the operation of the ACF program intense as the program launched in June and now the partners are fully capacitated to implement it.
- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF) had a regular visit to Syunik province on 16-18 November which was also an ECHO content mission this time when the latter was to visit and interview beneficiaries to see the results of the program. Other organizations were present too, such as Save the Children, UNHCR, etc.
- On the day of the visit, the 16th of November, Azerbaijani-Armenian clashes on the border began. However, they witnessed that people in Goris were calm. Some incidents happened in borderline Tegh community which they were to visit.
- Beneficiaries raised their problems in different dimensions which were also related to being deprived of farming and cattle-breeding opportunities in bordering communities. Although humanitarian assistance is highly important, people mainly need jobs to work and sustain their families. Although parents seek to address the needs of their children, to be economically sustainable and implement that they need money. There are no job opportunities according to them. Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF) added that if there were any social entrepreneurship or individual entrepreneurship opportunities in borderline communities, that would be amazing. To add to that, humanitarian assistance cannot last forever.
- The need to prepare these people to live individually and earn money to upbringing their children in decent conditions was emphasized.
- Collaboration between different PWG members and awareness about one another's activities which makes referrals possible in the field was praised once more. In that regard importance was given to the outcomes of the PWG.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev agreed with the above-mentioned statements of Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF) which were also supported by UNHCR protection monitoring results: people do not want humanitarian assistance, they want to have employment, proper livelihood, dignified and decent way of living. Also, more humanitarian assistance means more donor fatigue.
- Some noble activities are planned by the members of the PWG concerning livelihood, employment, disaster risk management, etc. UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev expressed a hope that these activities would be included in the UNSDCF. Potentially there might be a need for a certain group of members of the PWG to continue gathering beyond the 1st of January 2022.

Mission Armenia (MA)

- Ms. Ani Ghazaryan (Mission Armenia) informed that MA distributed NFIs, including kitchen utensils. 27 families received such utensils in Gegharkunik province, 2 more

families received cookers in Shirak province.

- Legal assistance was provided to PoCs in Gegharkunik province whose issues were related to the extension of passport validity, university tuition fee discount, payment of compensation of bank deposit, provision of financial support to families of victims of 44-day war.
- Psychological support was provided in Gegharkunik and Shirak provinces, these services included psychological needs assessments, roadmap to the solution of identified issues, including counselling and psychotherapy.
- Ms. Ani Ghazaryan (Mission Armenia) thanked Mr. Hayk Khemchyan (UNICEF) for sharing about the high need of psychological support for the persons in Goris and mentioned that she would refer that information to the local representation of MA in Syunik province so that they can try to address the problems in Goris.
- MA hotline receives calls from Armavir, Kotayk, Yerevan on current humanitarian aid project implemented by MA.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev thanked MA for helping UNHCR to find durable solutions and support for the residents of the collective shelters. Rental subsidy support and winterization assistance are provided to those who move out of the collective centers and are the most vulnerable.

UNHCR Snapshot Protection Monitoring Report (July-August 2021)

- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev started to present the September-October snapshot protection monitoring report which is the shorter version of previous reports as most of the issues identified are unfortunately the same. The most urgent ones are now placed in three-page-long snap shot reports which will be continues, except the annual report which will be longer.
- The total number of persons interviewed in September-October was 4497, out of which 53% were women and 47% were men respectively.
- UNHCR also monitors the intention among persons to return to their habitual residence prior to the September conflict in light of Paragraph 7 of the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020. The intention among those to return dropped to 5% compared to 9% in May/June and 6% in July/August.
- One of the priority needs identified was cash, however people also state that employment would be better than just cash. The second need identified is shelter and UNHCR observes how far the Government is ready to tackle this issue to make recommendations with joint efforts if necessary.
- The results of the monitoring of departure from Yerevan to Stepanakert by UNHCR were shared. There has been only one bus departing from Yerevan with a capacity of 50 people starting from July 1. The trends have been the same starting from the beginning of July.
- UNHCR hotline keeps receiving calls from all categories of forcibly displaced persons on its hotline, statistics were shared on it and PWG members were welcomed by UNHCR SPO to share information on their operation if they want to be referred to by UNHCR hotline.
- The UNSDCF has been approved by the Government and the UN in Armenia the

implementation of which is due to start on the January 1st of 2022 which was already shared by the PWG members.

- UNHCR Armenia is in a detailed deliberation within the office and with the headquarters on how protection per se should feature in the UNSDCF, as well as how, if at all, the PWG can fit into the UNSDCF. These questions were also addressed to the PWG members for them to ponder on although there are certain result groups led by certain UN agencies in UNSDC.
- UNHCR wants to emphasize the need to provide protection to all categories of forcibly displaced persons, i.e., asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, persons in refugee like situation from NK and from Syria. UNHCR welcomed any ideas by the members of the PWG on how to move forward beyond the 1st of January 2022, after the end of IARP, to be shared and included in the discussion forum of PWG.
- One of the options which was slightly touched by Ms. Maria Poghosyan (ACF), is the continuation of a similar forum. According to her this way the activities of the PWG members are more transparent and they are more accountable towards the beneficiaries. For example, during field visits PWG members are aware about one another's activities and can make relevant referrals once approached by beneficiaries. She also added that one organization cannot cover all the aspects of the problem because problems are very diverse. So, some consultative or working group model can work. She further mentioned that immense work has been carried out in different WGs and especially during winterization period all the efforts should be joined to be near and with beneficiaries who are in need.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev mentioned that UNHCR also considers the above-mentioned option to have a forum or platform and if a decision is made to continue, UNHCR will include all different categories of above mentioned PoCs in it to make sure that nobody is indeed left behind. It will also give an idea to sister UN agencies, partners and stakeholders what the condition of forcibly displaced persons and their protection is in Armenia.
- Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan (UNICEF) thanked UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev for raising the need of the continuation of this work and finding ways on how PWG can be part of UNSDCF. He supported the views voiced by Action Against Hunger and UNHCR on the need of awareness on the work in progress by PWG members especially in these winterization period and in that regard also highlighted the importance of not having duplications.
- Ms. Maria Poghosyan (Action against Hunger) inquired about the current figures of the persons displaced from NK in RA, to her knowledge the figure was approximately 20.000 persons. UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev invited the representatives of IM working group present in the meeting to address the inquiry. Ms. Rima Sargsyan took the floor and answered that the updated population figure shared during the last WG meeting was 28.000 persons and a chart is already uploaded to the UNHCR data portal where information per province is available. Mr. Milindi Illangasinghe, Information Management Officer, UNHCR supported what was said by Ms. Rima and added that the updates will be regular and uploaded to the portal.
- Ms. Susanna Grigoryan, UNHCR, made a short analysis of the number of those persons in refugee like situation from NK who will remain in Armenia in light of the figure voiced by IM colleagues and the percentage of those who expressed an intention to return during UNHCR protection monitoring. According to her 20.000 persons in refugee like situation from NK will remain in Armenia.

- Mr. Umar Yakhyaev, UNHCR SPO mentioned that the figure is an issue and will be an issue until relevant stakeholders will take the responsibility to gather all the data. Positive indications are seen from the MoLSA who are trying to consolidate data through their social workers. The problem is that not all persons in refugee like situation from NK approach social workers because some of them are not in need of social protection. So this makes it possible to concentrate on the most vulnerable ones who are in need of immediate attention. For UNHCR, under its generic mandate, protection is bigger than just social protection, so having the full picture is important.

Miscellaneous updates and issues.

The next steps were presented. The last PWG meeting is agreed to hold on the 29th of December.

The decision of UNHCR on the continuation of the PWG will be shared for the consideration and discussion of the PWG members before the final meeting.

The minutes of the meeting will be shared for comments and clearances prior to uploading them to the portal. The presentation will also be shared.

UNHCR Armenia
November 2021