

PROTECTION WORKING GROUP MEETING

MINUTES

29 DECEMBER 2021

VENUE: Yerevan, ARMENIA (via MS Teams)

Participating organizations:

On 29 December 2021, 20 participants attended the twenty-seventh meeting of the Protection Working Group (PWG).

Meeting agenda:

- Updates by participating organizations.
- Presentation of departure monitoring and key informant dashboards by UNHCR.
- Updates on the UNHCR hotline operation in partnership with KASA Foundation.
- Transition from the IARP into the PSAP.
- Presentation of participatory assessment and validation report by UNHCR.
- Miscellaneous updates and issues.

Updates by participating organizations

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev announced that it was the last meeting of the Interagency Protection Working Group which was created twelve months ago in relationship to the interagency emergency response to the escalation of the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh. He also acknowledged that a lot was achieved by the joint team of different partners.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- Ms. Rima Kabrilyants (IOM) thanked for the work and coordination by the PWG which she found helpful for internal referrals.
- IOM is renovating N1 nursing home in Malatia-Sebastia district of Yerevan based on a new funding received at the end of September. Now the center hosts 300 elderly people. On the 1st of January after the completion of renovation the center will host 60 more people composed of both displaced persons and irregular migrants.
- By the request of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) all the funding in the amount of \$110,000 was directed into the renovation of three sections of the nursing home: quarantine section, laundry section and another space which was in an unfavorable condition and not used before.
- In parallel IOM also does a survey among displaced persons and vulnerable migrants in addition to the one done previous year to assess multisectoral needs for this target group of population.
- To the inquiry of Mr. Umar Yakhyaev (UNHCR) who the displaced persons are who are going to enter the renovated nursing home and whether they are from the "Golden Palace" collective shelter in Tsaghkadzor who are invited out from the shelter now, Ms. Rima Kabrilyants (IOM) answered that it is the Government who chooses people to enter, and IOM does not have that information now. It was agreed that once people move into the N1 nursing home renovated by IOM on the 1st of January, the latter will share with the members of the PWG who those newly placed displaced persons are so that UNHCR can act accordingly.

UNICEF

- Mr. Vigen Shirvanyan, UNICEF Climate Change Officer, joined Ms. Rima Kabrilyants (IOM) and thanked all the colleagues in the PWG for their inputs and dedicated work over these months.
- UNICEF had a mission to Syunik province on 21-25 December during which isolated villages (6 in Kapan and 3 in Goris communities) were visited.
- People in these isolated villages, e.g., Tsav, Nerkin Hand, Chakaten, etc., use the alternative road to go to Meghri, which is accessible but subject to use upon weather conditions.
- UNICEF met almost all kids and teachers in these isolated villages.
- These days many organizations visit the people in these villages including in the scope of their social responsibility, so people do not feel forgotten, they are in a festive mood and it is a psychological boost for them. In general, although they do not feel isolated, security and connectivity issues with centers remain. For example, UNICEF could hardly pass from Chakaten to Kapan, as well as from Vorotan to Khot because of poor weather conditions.
- The visit was mutually encouraging, as UNICEF team was infected with the positive energy and vibes of the people visited.
- Ms. Sahakanush Yeghiazaryan (UNHCR) confirmed that the communities are very strong, although they have many difficulties.

Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS)

- Ms. Hasmik Khachatryan (ARCS) mentioned that ARCS tries to provide dignified support to the displaced people and assist the Government in their response activities with the support of its partner organizations.
- Protection Monitoring continues with the persons in refugee like situation from NK initiated by UNHCR. Needs assessment has been done with almost 3000 HHs since July. 12 social workers were included in 6 regions to do case management with the identified vulnerable families. Cash support and NFIs have been distributed to such families.
- 3900 packages of NFIs have been distributed as a continuation of winterization support for identified families who were not included for cash support by UNHCR delivered by Mission Armenia.
- Cash support has been provided by ARCS and the cash and voucher system is being improved, self-assessment exercise has been conducted within the organization and a special improvement plan has been developed.
- 15.000 individuals in refugee like situation from NK have received AMD 15,000 with the support of Swiss Red Cross for the utility's fees. The total amount of support is AMD 225,000,000.
- 1800 HHs, both local and displaced, living in 29 bordering communities have received cash assistance (AMD 280,000 per family) initiated by ARCS partner organization ICRC in December.
- ARCS has applied and received an approval for the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of IFRC in the amount of AMD 275,400,000 and will support the Government project of the provision of cash assistance. Families who lost their property in NK will receive from AMD 25,000 to AMD 45,000. The project will be also contributed by ICRC in the amount of AMD 200,000,000.
- With the support of UNHCR ARCS provided livelihood items to those families who move out from collective shelters as an addition to the rental subsidy support that UNHCR provides through Mission Armenia. Some rapid assessment of their background and ability skills was conducted to be able to provide them with respective tools, cattle breeding animals, etc. About 120 HHs have received such tools and 90 of them were those who left collective shelters.
- Implemented together with UNHCR, with the support of ARCS outreach volunteers and the involvement of persons in refugee like situation from NK Peaceful

Coexistence Projects (PCPs) were developed in August and finalized in December. The committee consisting of UNHCR and ARCS staff approved 25 projects in 18 communities where diverse other projects were already implemented with the above-mentioned funds aiming at the community development.

- 8 CBOs were approved in communities that host persons in refugee like situation from NK the final description of the implementation of which will be distributed in January.

Mission Armenia (MA)

- Ms. Ani Ghazaryan (Mission Armenia) provided information on distribution of food and NFIs, provision of legal and psychological aid by Mission Armenia during December 2021.

Humanitarian Assistance in the Form of Food/Non-Food Basic Commodities

Marz (region)	Number of families/PoC/items	Type of assistance	Donor organization
All Marzes of the RA	53 families/ A package per family	Hygiene items: shampoo, soap, tooth paste and brush, scissors and comb, towel, napkin, medical plaster.	Mission Armenia
Shirak	3 families/ 1 item per family	Folding bad with mattress	Mission Armenia

Legal Assistance

Legal assistance was provided to 1 PoC based in Shirak Marz and 4 PoC based in Gegharkunik Marz.

- The PoC reported that s/he was not able to receive the humanitarian cash assistance provided by Mission Armenia as her bank account was blocked by the RA Compulsory Enforcement Service, whereas humanitarian assistance is exempt from any kind of state restrictions according to the RA legislation. Due to the further investigation of the case by the MA lawyer, it turned out that the money which the PoC was reporting about was received from other address than Mission Armenia and was not a humanitarian assistance.
- The PoC was provided with counselling about terms and eligibility criteria for the Government-run assistance programme (AMD 50,000 per month with duration of 4 months).
- The PoC reported that s/he did not receive the cash assistance from the RA Government although s/he had received a notification via SMS. The PoC was informed by the MA lawyer that the delay of money transfer is within the responsibility of the bank. The PoC was referred to the bank to which his/her account belonged.
- The PoC reported that his application to the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for the Government-run cash assistance programme (AMD 25,000 per month with duration of 4 months) was rejected for the reason of not being registered in Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas the PoC had all the necessary documents to proof his/her valid registration in NK. The PoC was provided with relevant counselling and was referred to the RA MLSA for submitting a complaint.
- The PoC reported that his/her bank account was blocked by the RA Compulsory Enforcement Service and s/he could not get the cash assistance provided by Mission Armenia. The PoC was provided with a reference from MA declaring that

the money send to the PoC was aimed for humanitarian support and was exempt from state restrictions.

Psychological Support

Psychological support was provided to PoC from NK based in Ararat, Armavir, Kotayk, Lori and Shirak Marzes and capital Yerevan.

Region	Number of PoC	Type of assistance	Donor
Armavir	49 PoC	First contact and primary needs assessment (11 PoC-home visit; 38 PoC-via telephone)	ECHO ¹ (REACT) ²
Lori (Vanadzor)	60 PoC	First contact and primary needs assessment (7 PoC-home visit; 53PoC-via telephone)	ECHO (REACT)
Lori (Spitak)	8 PoC	First contact and primary needs assessment	ECHO (REACT)
Shirak (Gyumri)	63 PoC	First contact and primary needs assessment (25 PoC-home visit; 24 PoC-via telephone, 14 PoC-visiting MA office)	ECHO (REACT)
Ararat (Artashat)	1 PoC	Individual counselling	ECHO (Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
	55 PoC	Group session	<u>ECHO</u> (Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
Kotayk (Hrazdan)	8 PoC (4-17 years of age)	Individual psychological work	ECHO (Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
	3 PoC (4-17 years of age)	Individual counselling	ECHO (Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced

¹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

² "Relief and Early Recovery for People Affected by Conflict in Armenia" Project

			people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
	-	Meeting with children (4-17 years of age) and their parents, needs assessment and group psychological sessions.	ECHO (Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
Yerevan	6 PoC	Group session	(Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
	7 PoC (children)	Group session	(Ensuring access to essential protection services for displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia)
	5 PoC	Individual counselling	Mission Armenia
	-	59 counselling via telephone	Mission Armenia
	-	10 home visits	Mission Armenia

- Ms. Elise Aroyan (UNHCR) added that UNHCR and MA work actively on the distribution of rental subsidy and winterization support. 116 HHs who left collective shelters voluntarily have received a rental subsidy support and 1095 HHs have received winterization support both ranging from AMD 68,000 to AMD 80,000 depending on the vulnerability score. UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev, emphasized that it is strategic for UNHCR to help these people in refugee like situation to become self-reliant and not dependent on any humanitarian support.

UNHCR

- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev noted that colleagues from UNHCR have visited Syunik where they also joined others and delivered holiday presents for kids.
- Departure monitoring continues by UNHCR daily and depending on whether the Government will continue to provide free transportation to the persons in refugee like situation from NK to return to NK, UNHCR will monitor the process in future. It is also somehow related to the implementation of paragraph 7 of the trilateral statement, monitors the sustainability of returns to NK, as well as helps to prepare itself once UNHCR, as an international community, receives an access to deliver humanitarian assistance to NK.
- The number of calls to UNHCR hotline maintained by partner organization "KASA" rises. The geography of the callers shows that awareness and accessibility to UNHCR hotline have been raised.
- Humanitarian assistance and protection issues are top concerns of the people who call to UNHCR hotline. Statistics were shared 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 Strategy and ToR of the Protection and Solutions Advisory Platform (PSAP) were shared with the members of the PWG prior to the meeting keeping in mind the requests by the members of the PWG to continue the coordination of activities.
- Once UNHCR takes the lead to coordinate the activities, all categories of persons of concern to UNHCR will be included in it, i.e., refugees, asylum seekers, persons in refugee like situation from NK and Syria and stateless persons. PSAP will fit into the UN country team through the information shared by UNHCR Representative who is a member of the UN country team.
- UNSDCF does not cover protection in UNHCR core activities per se and to be able to deliver its core mandate UNHCR needs to move into the advisory platform which is open for a membership.
- If UNSDCF is only for state and UN agencies, national NGOs/civil society will be also included in the PSAP and play a role in the implementation and support to the target population.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev expressed a hope that IOM will also be in the platform since migration and forced displacement go hand in hand.
- Ms. Hasmik Khachatryan (ARCS) expressed her appreciation with regard to the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and other persons in refugee like situation into the platform as there is a need to organize protection response for them too, include other organizations who do such activities and do proper mapping and advocacy activities. She recommended holding meetings quarterly instead of monthly to make it more important content-wise. The comment was noted by UNHCR.
- UNHCR SPO, Mr. Umar Yakhyaev invited members of the PWG to share their comments by January 14 so that the offline meeting is planned by the end of January.

UNHCR presentation of participatory assessment and validation report

- Mr. Karen Khachatryan (UNHCR) presented that besides the protection monitoring done among the persons in refugee like situation from NK, UNHCR did a Participatory Assessment (PA) exercise among refugees, asylum seekers, including asylum-seekers currently in detention facilities and persons in refugee like situation from Syria in June-July.
- In total 75 PoCs participated in the assessment exercise via phone calls or house visit interviews. Adults aged 31-60 were 57.3%, 24% were adolescents and youth aged 16-30 and 18.7% were individuals over 61 years old. Gender composition: 60% were females and 40% males accordingly.
- PoCs interviewed were mainly coming from Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, etc.
- The priority needs voiced were housing, livelihood, social/financial, healthcare.
- In November as a follow-up to PA and PM activities, a validation workshop with 54 participants, including governmental partner agencies, NGOs, UN staff, and persons of concern, was organized to ensure that the main protection findings of the

assessments were properly communicated to persons of concern and stakeholders keeping age, gender and diversity principles, as well as accountability and feedback mechanisms.

- The issues validated during the workshop concerned language barriers, public attitude, employment issues, housing and accommodation, social protection, and healthcare.

Miscellaneous updates and issues.

The next steps were presented.

The minutes of the meeting will be shared for comments and clearances prior to uploading them to the portal. The presentation and reports will also be shared. The Strategy and ToR documents of the Protection and Solutions Advisory Platform (PSAP) will be open for comments by January 14, 2022.

The last interagency PWG meeting which was part of the Interagency Protection Response Plan and Interagency Coordination Steering Group was concluded.

*UNHCR Armenia
December 2021*