

PROTECTION WORKING GROUP MEETING

MINUTES

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

VENUE: Yerevan, ARMENIA (via MS Teams)

Participating organizations:

On 14 September 2021, 20 participants attended the twenty-fourth meeting of the Protection Working Group (PWG).

Meeting agenda:

- Updates by participating organisations.
- Presentation of Mid-year Protection Monitoring Report (Jan-Jun 2021).
- Presentation of departures monitoring and key informant dashboards.
- Updates on the UNHCR hotline operation in partnership with Kasa Foundation.
- Miscellaneous updates and issues.

UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Umar Yakhyaev heading the inter-agency protection working group presented himself and mentioned that Vigen Shirvanyan is representing UNICEF as a thematic working group co-lead.

Marietta Khurshudyan, WHO introduced herself, it was the first time she was participating in the PWG meeting. She represents the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) component of the response plan and leads the Armenian Technical Working group on MHPSS.

Updates by participating organizations

Action Against Hunger

- Ms Maria Poghosyan mentioned that she was previously presenting “Save the Children” Nagorno-Karabagh (NK) response team in the Protection Working Group. The response team and “Save the Children” have seized their operation, and Ms Poghosyan has joined the Action Against Hunger as a Programme Manager for an ECHO funded project dedicated to protecting people displaced from NK.
- The project has two components: protection/child protection and mine risk education/awareness raising. The participants were further informed that this project is mainly partner-led, so Action Against Hunger is doing this project together with its three partners: Mission Armenia, Partnership and Teaching NGO and Hollow Trust Foundation. Mission Armenian, Partnership and Teaching NGO will be doing the protection component of the program and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education will be led by Hollow Trust Foundation. The project has been just launched; some modification was made, and mine risk education component was added.
- At this moment, 10 community multifunctional centers are envisaged to be established. The child friendly spaces that have been established by Save the

Children NK response team within Partnership and Teaching NGO will continue their operation and the new ones will be established in collaboration with the partner Mission Armenia: 2 in Yerevan, 1 in Hrazdan, Kotayk, 1 in Kapan, Syunik, 1 in Chambarak, Gegharkunik. 6 multifunctional centres will be operating as child friendly spaces and providing services to children and their caregivers.

- MHPSS services will be provided to children and their caregivers, legal services will be available to those who will need these services (helping with documentation and other issues that population may face), recreational activities of children, out of school activities will be organized, psychological support will be provided. Within this child friendly spaces English language classes and IT classes for older teenagers are also planned to engage them also in the child friendly spaces.
- This practice came from the previous experience of organisations which established child friendly spaces such as Save the Children and UNICEF. The mine risk education component is a new component added to the project, which aims to raise awareness on the risks of the unexploded ordnances among children and their community caregivers. It is planned to raise awareness of the whole public on the matter as the partner Halo Trust confirmed that there is a huge need. Training of trainers with Halo trust specialists and specialists from the multifunctional centers will be organised so that these trained staff will go to the communities, to borderline schools to have sessions with children of different age groups and their caregivers.
- Information leaflets, posters will also be developed and in this regard all the key stakeholders in the sector will be mapped.
- Action Against Hunger have met with UNICEF representatives on this thematic area to coordinate the activities not to duplicate anything, to fill the gaps in the field.

International Organisation for Migration

- Update were presented on the project funded by Japan government. It has NFI, construction component, NFI distribution has been finished: almost 4000 hygiene kits were distributed to people from NK in 3 provinces: Ararat, Armavir and Gegharkunik. Currently The post distribution monitoring is being finished.
- The construction sites are "Internats", nursing houses in Yerevan, Nor-Nork, Malatia, Dzorak. The constructions are over in New York, 3 rooms are done and furnished. Elevator renovation was also done, 3 elevators were not working, people were not able to use elevators for 2 months. It was an urgent need for a big number of people with disabilities. The government asked to pop in and make it quick.
- In Dzorak 6 bathrooms and 2 floors are being renovated. Half of the work is already done. It was not implemented all at once as people are still living there. It was separated to 2 halves. Currently the second part is being implemented. The quarantine area was renovated, starting from the first days of Covid 19 outbreak people were living in horrible conditions.
- Other updates were presented. New fund is received from The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of about 160,000. One of the components is going to be NFI and construction.
- Discussions with the Ministry are currently ongoing to decide where the work is going to be done. Probably it's going to be the Number One Nursing House wash/protection is going to be implemented. Things are still ongoing; calculations are made regarding NFI. Probably 1200 people from NK will be addressed. The procurement and logistics are being organized.

Umar Yakhyaev, UNHCR asked whether people are leaving from the shelters they are renovating and whether they have seen any forcible evictions from the shelters.

Rima Kabrilyants, IOM answered that especially from nursing houses people do not leave unless they die, old people are living there. When she calls them to check the numbers of people living there, every time the number goes down. The main purpose is that these Internats host more people targeting people from NK. Only one person returned to NK, the family decided that it is better to bring the person back. Others are staying and feel comfortable, no complaint from neither the staff nor the people. Staff is really supportive in helping the people in receiving the social allowances. They contact the ministry as a lot of people do not receive the money. The Ministry is not really helpful in terms of information.

Frederic Cussigh, Senior Inter-agency coordinator, UNHCR thanked for the update and emphasized that the information on hygiene kits, shelter repair, elevators etc needs to be reported into the shelter NFI and asked to make sure that someone from IOM report the same elements.

Rima Kabrilyants, IOM mentioned that the numbers are reported. The money spent has been reported not the money funded, the numbers reached are reported.

Mission Armenia (MA)

- MA's updates were shared for August. Regarding the humanitarian assistance in the form of food, nonfood, basic commodities 2 regions were covered: Shirak and Gegharkunik. The distribution was funded by UMCOR and in total 7 ovens were distributed in Shirak region and 5 in Gegharkunik, the 36 kitchen sets were distributed in Shirak region for around 194 POCs, 21 kitchen sets were distributed in Gegharkunik for 96 POCs. In total MA had 13 phone calls during which Mission Armenia specialists referred the POCs to specific fields.
- Regarding the legal assistance 1 POC didn't receive the 68,000 AMD cash assistance provided for 4 months. The person was informed from the bank that the amount was transferred but it returned back to the bank. He was provided with information by MA lawyers about terms of cash assistance and he was helped to draft a letter to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs on this issue. 2 other people didn't receive the same assistant of 68,000 AMD for children because of different issues. One of the POCs sent a letter to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for two children, however the application was rejected based on the fact that the children were not registered in the NK. The individual was provided with information about terms of assistance and was referred to the Passport department for the registration certificate.
The other POC didn't attach the birth certificate of the child while filling online application. As a result, the application was rejected, and the POC didn't get the assistance. He was provided with the needed information by MA lawyers and during the conversation the assistant of the Head of the Unified Social Services informed that the beneficiary's case will be discussed, and the corresponding decision will be made, the information will be provided within a reasonable time.
- Another POC who lives in his daughter's house in inappropriate condition and needs a shelter was assisted. Legal advice was provided on the resettlement programs for the displayed persons from NK and they were referred to write an application to the Operative Headquarters of the Artsakh Government in Yerevan.

- Psychological support was provided in Shirak and Gegharkunik. Psychological needs assessment was done with 44 families, home visits and counseling were held. Approximately 148 POCs from 36 families made office visits, took part in group discussions.
- Another 11 families got psychological counseling and they were assisted via phone calls in Gegharkunik. In Gegharkunik 7 POCs made office visits, 35 POCs got psychological counseling via phone calls and 18 POCs participated in different kind of group meetings, trainings. Other families got psychological counseling and psychotherapy courses in the framework of a project that just ended at the end of August named "Supporting urgent food security, nutrition, hygiene and health needs for spontaneous arrivals and vulnerable host communities in Armenia". In the frame of this project 7 training sessions were held in 4 baby friendly spaces located in Masis, Hrazdan, Nor-Nork and Avan.
- Ararat center gathered together 48 women during face-to-face sessions and another 30 women during remote sessions, Kotayk Center hosted 28 women on face-to-face sessions and 40 women on remote sessions in Yerevan, both centers in Nor-Nork and Avan together hosted 51 women to take part in face-to-face sessions, 43 women in remote sessions. In total, 240 pregnant and lactating women were supported through psychosocial sessions. The training activities are funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France having Action Against Hunger as a lead partner. Within the framework of the project the following distribution was done as well, in Nor-Nork, Hrazdan, Avan, Masis and Yerevan centers: food parcels were delivered for around 1000 POCs and in Yerevan, Nor-Nork Center cloths and other parcels were delivered to 16 POCs, funded by Aznavour Foundation.

Umar Yakhyaev thanked Mission Armenia for the implementation of joint with UNHCR and USS of MLSA rental subsidy supports to the residents of collective shelters and transitional centers, who are currently in the process of relocating themselves to private sector where livelihood and NFI assistance will be provided as well. So that's another part of MA's contribution to the Protection Working Group Activities.

Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS)

- Updates were provided by ARCS about the recent implementation results. The main activity was joining the state scheme of care support together with UNHCR. In July ARCS succeeded with finalization and implementation of the previously agreed MOU with The United Social Services MLSA, and in July all the transfers to 14,000 people were conducted by ARCS in close cooperation with the relevant financial service providers. 85 families did not receive their care for different reasons, and ARCS does not have access to some 50 of them. ARCS is trying to connect with the United Social Services, regional authorities as well and the Armenian Red Cross branches in this regard. Maybe these people will be contacted to inform them about the deadlines of receiving the money. The activity was quite successful, more than 99% of people received this care support.
- The post distribution monitoring exercise was conducted, the final analysis is not ready, but some information is already available that they spent the money for their basic needs of food and rental payments, medicines and other urgent needs.
- ARCS is involved in a big research on the needs assessment of the families from NK. This is the protection monitoring and case management processes. Protection monitoring was conducted with more than 1000 families. The report is being prepared by UNHCR colleagues. The case management step by step was started

in August and 29 intervention plans were already initiated with people and this exercise will continue.

- A lot of other basic needs were addressed already, hygienic packages were distributed. The first phase is finalized completely, and the second phase of the distribution is being implemented. The first phase was implemented in six regions of Armenia with 20% coverage of local population. 4500 packages were distributed to the NK population in six regions, which were identified by protection monitoring, by other means of identification and based on their vulnerability. During the second phase the 11 regions of Armenia are covered, and the amount of the packages is more than 6000.
- The big component on child resilience building was started in July, and in August more than 1700 children were included in this exercise by organizing different child resilience building events on community and Individual/family levels. This also covered six regions.
- PSS activities were also conducted: group events for adults and individual talks for children to be able to identify some symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and to be able to refer them further. Several group events were conducted with participation of 126 people.
- Resilience kits were distributed to children, which included support for them to go to school and some other appliances were included. 60 children which were identified as most vulnerable received tablets for access to education to ensure their access to education, especially considering the unpredictable situation with Covid. Within the regular component as well, such distribution was made to some 50 families with children.
- Another project was initiated on 7th of September by ARCS, which also includes support to NK displaced people. The methodology will be finalized, Armenian Caritas is the consortium partner. But the project is implemented also in Georgia for COVID affected people and ARCS is working in consortium. The project targets also people affected from COVID and people affected by NK conflict. It includes also humanitarian support and livelihood support to people from NK,
- with the help of UNHCR some 100 families from NK will be supported with livelihood support, by identifying them through the protection monitoring or through the partners like United Social Services. This will allow them to become self-reliant further and not dependent from the rental or other supports from different organizations.
- Some household basic needs of certain families will be identified through case management and household support will be provided to 500 people during October-November.
- ARCS continues the fund-raising efforts. The Conaka project is funded by Austrian Development Cooperation and the leading partner is Austrian Red Cross.

Umar Yakhyaev also highlighted that thanks to ARCS UNHCR is providing additional support to community-based organizations, local authorities as well as implementing some projects on community support initiatives, which is very much appreciated.

UNICEF Armenia

- Updates were provided from UNICEF, UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) 3tr tranche is confirmed and the last documents are being finalized. Most probably the project will kick off in October. Action Against Hunger updated on child friendly spaces, this project is implemented in cooperation with UNICEF.

- CSSF is a project which represents the joint UNDP and UNICEF efforts to advance stability and safety in the bordering communities of Syunik, Vayots Dzor and Gegharkunik regions, which are directly affected by the NK conflict. Within this project activities will be implemented to deliver transformation at institutional level, local governing bodies, CSOs, businesses and on the level of human development: skills, services, behavior, etc. The project will provide evidence-based interventions addressing conflict entailed instability and vulnerabilities in the remote and isolated bordering communities.

Umar Yakhyaev updated that UNHCR together with Mission Armenia is finalizing the construction of playgrounds for children, as well as some sports pitches.

Umar Yakhyaev informed about a very interesting and beautiful discussion with Premiere Urgence, which is implementing PSS activities with its partners in Armenia. In terms of having some sort of activities there that would target 1st aide PSS as well as some indications on GBV response, UNICEF and Action Against Hunger colleagues were suggested to discuss separately to give locations where the sports grounds and the playgrounds for children are built. It would be discussed what kind of PSS, LGBT support can be organized with their assistance.

- Updated were provided by UNICEF on education part. The partnership with the ARCS and the fund for demolishing, demining on mine action is finished. This project which was funded through SURF included some establishment of temporary learning and recreation centers, and now Against Hunger received the funding for mine action or inclusive ordinance risk education.
- UNICEF urged one more time through this platform that those materials and the work that has been done within the partnership with the ARCS was closely coordinated with the International Committee of the Red Cross, all the guidelines were followed, so this work smoothly will be continued through ECHO funding.
- Another update is that the project implementation for supporting education continuity as part of Japan Emergency Aid Funding continues and the upgrading of wash facilities has been finished in almost 5-6 schools and by the end of September the distribution of school furniture to those schools, which were identified as having the biggest number of removed children from NK will start. Tsaghkadzor school which has almost doubled the number of schoolchildren because of hosting children from NK was brought as an example of target school. Some furniture and upgrade of wash facilities is being provided. Also, this project is being accompanied by some teacher training on remedial classes as children have missed some part of academic curriculum during the frequent moves. It aims to capacitate teachers so that they can address the learning gap. This is being done in close coordination with Open Society Foundation which has developed a curriculum for 3rd and 6th grade on math and languages.
- UNICEF received another funding from US State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and will start working cross sector, the aim of this funding is to address multi sectoral assistance to children and families in refugee like situations. There are three main objectives. One is related to washing schools. The second one is emergency social transfers or social support to households as social protection supplement and the third one is the improvement of care protection of the affected population.

Umar Yakhyaev highlighted the importance of mine action and awareness raising related to it, especially in areas of highest contamination.

Rima Kabrilyants asked about the Japan funding, when the activities will be finished.

Alvard Poghosyan, UNICEF informed that the activities will be finished until the end of the year.

UNHCR Mid-Year protection Monitoring Report

- UNHCR with partners, currently with ARCS conducts protection monitoring in all provinces of Armenia. The main highlights of the six-month report were presented, it was mentioned that the report is available on protection working group portal.
- Umar Yakhyaev highlighted that the information and the data gathered is much bigger than even in the narrative of the report, which is placed online in the portal.
- It was mentioned that people are still moving from province to province. As an example, Ararat was presented due to the necessity for labor during summer when it is time for the harvests. The participants were informed that the next series of protection monitoring report is being concluded which is going to be shared very soon. It will cover July-August of this year. It will include the new updates on the situation of the people.
- The decision on cash assistance together with ARCS and the decision to provide rental subsidy supports together with Mission Armenia are evidence based on the outcomes of the current protection monitoring activities that UNHCR has been doing since the beginning of this year.
- The priorities of the people were presented, shelter and cash are among the first two highest priority needs that people in the refugee like situation shared with UNHCR.
- UNHCR is trying to improve and update the protection and operational delivery through and together with its partners. As it was presented by ARCS, the household items distribution has been provided to the most vulnerable cases or individuals within the case management component which ARCS is implementing at the moment together with support from Mission Armenia.
- Three priority needs identified through the protection monitoring activity: shelter, cash, household items, covered UNHCR and partners' direct intervention.
- Part of the protection monitoring activities is the key informant interviews. The key informant interviews are being improved, the number of key informants to be interviewed is expanded to not only community volunteers but also community leaders and service providers be government or humanitarian agencies to understand and triangulate the situation. There is another evidence for the collective shelters/transitional centers residents rental subsidy support because the shelters availability was mentioned as bad by 37% and the intervention was needed.
- With regards to education availability, 74% had mentioned that it's good and 20% had mentioned that it's sufficient. The hard work of the education sub-working group was highlighted, too.
- The data on departure monitoring was shared. Starting from 7th of July the drop in numbers is observed because the government made the decision to move into provision of one bus per day moving out of here, which gives a possibility to have 50 people maximum.

Kasa Foundation

- Updates regarding the UNHCR hotline were presented, which started its operation from 13 August 2021. 89 unique calls were received, this is the number of the calls that were also registered in the Kobo form that UNHCR maintains. The information is registered be a complaint, a request for information or other issue.

- Besides these calls, lots of repetitive calls were received. People are calling to the hotline with the same question and same complaint during the day for several times. It is not deemed necessary to register all the time.
- Most people called from Yerevan. The gender of callers is mainly female, calls received from males are usually from the regular caseload and not people from NK.
- 54% were marked with vulnerabilities. The criteria to assess the vulnerability was given by UNHCR.
- The humanitarian aid and access to social payments were among the main subjects of concern in August.
- People from NK were calling about school items. From time to time one or another kind of information is being actual and later it stops being very urgent or important. Currently the hotline does not receive calls regarding school items, but people are still calling regarding the 68,000 AMD that the government is providing as a financial assistance to NK displaced people. All the other calls are about documentation, health issues.
- New infographics or snapshot will be presented during the next working group meetings.

Maria Poghosyan, Action Against Hunger asked whether the hotline number can be shared to refer people from NK, as Action Against Hunger receives calls regarding humanitarian assistance.

Marine Tunyan, Kasa Foundation confirmed that the hotline is free of charge and can be shared.

Umar Yakhyaev informed that UNHCR and partners have been gathering the database on service providers in every province of the country since January as having a separate hotline was planned and this information is currently being updated by colleagues to provide to Kasa Foundation. Instead of referring a person calling from provinces to services available in Yerevan, the person can be referred directly to NGO/CBO in the particular province, whom we have met with and the NGO agreed to be referred from the hotline.

Umar Yakhyaev also highlighted the importance of sharing the UNHCR hotline number to many people. It was mentioned that it is extremely important for UNHCR to refer if necessary, should the issues of GBV raise or the issues of PSEA raise to a relevant service provider be governmental or non-governmental.

Milindi Illangasinghe, Information Management Officer, UNHCR highlighted that the gathering of information on “who is doing what where” is already being conducted by all the working groups. The link to the data portal was shared where the activities done by the organizations in protection is tracked. It was mentioned that the other working groups are also doing the same.

The tracking of the consolidated version of the information of the working groups was emphasized to avoid any duplication.

Umar Yakhyaev mentioned that the information was shared with Kasa Foundation on the service providers, whom UNHCR met because UNHCR does not want to just refer for the sake of referring as it doesn't work like that. UNHCR refers for the sake of later follow up knowing who the people are referred to. It is known which partner is that, and preferably it is government run service because that is mostly sustainable service.

Some activities have been seized to exist, some partners have moved from one service to another, which also is natural in the evolving situation and therefore UNHCR is trying to do the utmost to make sure that the activities or the service providers UNHCR is referring to are mostly up to date.

Kasa Foundation is also rechecking the activities of service providers.

Miscellaneous updates and issues.

Maria Poghosyan, Action Against Hunger asked about the 5Ws, whether they will be shared to fill in the new projects.

Umar Yakhyaev informed that after the meeting with UNICEF colleagues, the indicators of the working group will be agreed on. It will be shared as soon as ready.

Another question was asked regarding the interagency response plan prolonging.

Umar Yakhyaev mentioned that it was prolonged from 1st of July to the end of the year. The final one will be shared as soon as it is finalized.

There is nothing new from protection working group parts because based on the different discussions with different colleagues in different partnering organizations the numbers went down (nobody knows the exact numbers) but the needs are remaining the same, specifically the protection needs. And of course, when it comes to issues education, child protection, generic protection, PSS, PSEA, GBV the needs are similar and the same as were before, at some parts they have increased to the level of numbers for example, shelter, employment, cash needs etc.

Umar Yakhyaev mentioned that initially discussed strategy and the TORs that colleagues have shared prior to his arrival back in November-December last year were drafted and placed in a manner that the narrative is still covering the current needs.

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 will also be shared.

Updates will be provided on further steps, including 5 Ws and indicators.

*UNHCR Armenia
September 2021*