



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO)

Neighbourhood, Middle East, South-West and Central Asia

Southeast Europe and Eastern Neighbourhood and Central Asia

# OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS WORKSHOP

**9 December 2024,**

**Yerevan, Armenia**

### Introduction

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus workshop was held in Yerevan on December 9, 2024, as a joint initiative of EU Commission services (DG ECHO, DG NEAR, FPI), EEAS, and hosted by the EU Delegation to the Republic of Armenia. The workshop brought together over 130 practitioners (both online and in-person) from humanitarian and development donors, UN agencies, International and National NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, the Red Cross Movement, and government representatives.

The workshop aimed to identify complementarities between humanitarian, peace, and development programming in three key topics: 1. From humanitarian cash to shock-responsive social protection; 2. Protection, Legal Assistance & Mental Health – Psychosocial Support and 3. Disaster Risk Reduction – Preparedness.

Ambassador Maragos, EU Ambassador to Armenia, Ms. Jacob UN Resident Coordinator and Ms. Gasparyan Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister T. Khachatryan delivered the opening speeches.

Mr. Auvinen, DG ECHO Head of Unit, underscored the government's critical role, with the support of Civil Society Organizations and the international community, for a successful Nexus strategy and a seamless transition between humanitarian, development and peace funding to support the inclusion of refugees as well as to be better prepared to face the possible future emergencies.

Ms. Zhamakochyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, noted that since 2020, Armenian society has faced numerous shocks. She presented the Government's vision focusing on the work already completed and the main milestones planned for 2025 with refugee integration focusing on employment and housing. The government also aims to further develop and institutionalize emergency preparedness and response systems, emphasizing the imperative of coherence in response strategies.

## **General recommendations**

The following operational conclusions capture the key messages shared by experts and participants:

- (1) The Armenia Nexus workshop was recognized by all participants as a timely and much-needed exercise and highly valued, with a shared view that it was the first in a series of events addressing priority topics through thematic working groups.
- (2) Collaboration between humanitarian, peace, and development actors is a cornerstone of progress. Strengthening systems for anticipatory action and institutional coordination to lay the foundation for effective preparedness and responses.
- (3) The workshop highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach to addressing challenges faced by refugees. Transitioning from emergency support to sustainable solutions remains complex. Strengthened coordination and partnerships, capacity development, innovative solutions, and balancing short-term relief and sustainable recovery strategies were among the most prevalent general recommendations.
- (4) The expansion of housing and livelihood opportunities, and the embedding of social protection systems within a framework that balances immediate responses with long-term recovery strategies are essential to operationalize a transformative Nexus supporting improved assistance and preparedness.
- (5) Future engagement to “Build Back Better” should focus on enhancing digital tools for planning and targeting, improving coordination structures from national to regional levels, and aligning funding with long-term assistance goals. The localization agenda underscores the importance of empowering local authorities and civil society organizations, embedding principles of gender equality, and promoting social cohesion.
- (6) The presentation concluded with a call for continued innovation and strengthened partnerships to sustain progress and address persistent challenges.
- (7) A thorough follow-up on the key recommendations should be conducted within the relevant coordination forums and completed by the end of 2025. A mid-year review could be scheduled to assess the progress of implementation.

## **Key sector recommendations**

For each of the three topics, participants engaged in a technical and operational discussion ranging from good practices, and lessons learned, current challenges, and identified actionable priorities for possible future joint engagement. By integrating these recommendations into its frameworks, Armenia can address immediate challenges while building a sustainable and inclusive future for its communities.

# **1. FROM HUMANITARIAN CASH TO SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION**

## **1.1. SUMMARY OF THE SESSION**

The session examined the important linkages between humanitarian cash and other response modalities to shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) interventions along the nexus and how these were operationalized in Armenia.

Challenges related to displacement, social inclusion, and economic stability require diversified strategies that address emergency, rehabilitation, and recovery phases.

Public-private partnerships and tailored approaches at national and local level are essential for sustainable integration by leveraging expertise and resources.

Extending/reshaping cash assistance programs, expanding services and access to income-generating opportunities and improving eligibility criteria for social housing can enhance more effective support for vulnerable communities and access to long-term solutions.

The transition from humanitarian cash assistance to a comprehensive, shock-responsive social protection system is critical in Armenia's efforts to address ongoing crises and build resilience to future shocks. This involves:

- conducting active and systematic information campaigns to raise awareness.
- involving state and local authorities, community structures, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Extending cash assistance beyond its typical duration (with gradual phase-out),
- enabling beneficiaries to achieve economic stability and reducing reliance on short-term aid, would also contribute to a successful integration.
- The integration of cash programs with other support systems such as housing, child protection, and livelihood services ensures a more sustainable approach.

A significant part of this transformation hinges on the adoption of innovative digital solutions such as: i) Expanding digital payment platforms, like e-wallets and food cards, simplifies aid distribution and enhances efficiency; ii) Improving the interoperability of data systems allows for precise targeting of vulnerable populations and better coordination among stakeholders; iii) Capacity-building initiatives, including training for frontline workers and the use of e-learning opportunities, which empower local NGOs and communities to prepare for and respond to future crises effectively.

Policy adjustments, such as the new Law on Social Assistance, also play a critical role in achieving these goals, notably removing barriers to access essential services. Postponing citizenship requirements for housing eligibility could ensure an increased uptake. Increasing the housing financial assistance, in line with the current market conditions, and/or providing facilitated access to loans would address the needs of communities more comprehensively. Linking housing programs with employment initiatives and access to services, as well as public-private partnerships can leverage underutilized public assets to foster integration and self-reliance.

Finally, sustainability is central to this framework. Incorporating green technologies into housing solutions enhances long-term resilience and environmental sustainability. Sustainable solutions must be inclusive, ensuring that green technologies in housing and other services are accessible to all, including women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. Coordination and communication between all stakeholders at national and local level are essential to ensure long lasting and successful outcomes.

## **1.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **a) Build resilience of the social protection systems:**

- Embed shock-responsive elements into the national social protection system, including policies, programmes (cash and services), institutional and workforce capacities and financing.
- Develop scalable systems to respond effectively to both individual shocks and larger crises.
- Invest in anticipatory action and preparedness, integrating shock-responsiveness into contingency planning and financing.
- Increase e-learning and continuous development opportunities for frontline workers.
- Invest in quality and expand access and reach of social services and train additional social workers.
- Provide the sufficient resources to scale up and institutionalize successful pilots.

### **b) Enhance Digitalization:**

- Utilize advanced, user-friendly and inclusive digital tools for needs assessments, case management, rapid response and financial aid distribution.
- Expand digital payment solutions (e.g., e-wallets) and integrate them with social protection schemes.
- Invest in digital literacy of the most vulnerable on use of social protection digital platforms.

### **c) Focus on Targeted Support:**

- Extend cash support durations and gradually shift emergency cash assistance programs to needs-based approaches linked to case management and integrated with livelihood programs.

### **d) Improve Coordination Mechanisms:**

- Strengthen collaboration among national authorities, local actors, and international partners to reduce the fragmentation of services, make coordinated and complementary contributions to social protection system strengthening.

- Foster joint monitoring and evaluation frameworks to measure impact and streamline efforts, including evidence generation and development of standard coordination tools and processes (e.g. 5Ws, mapping of services etc.).
- e) Address Vulnerabilities and ensure Accountability to Affected Populations:**
- Prioritize inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to ensure no one is left behind.
  - Include marginalized groups in program planning, implementation and monitoring.
  - Develop and expand the reform of vulnerability assessment beyond the current categorical approach to include the socio-economic dimension.
  - Prioritize social work and case management to provide a holistic and sustainable assistance.
- f) Promote Housing and Livelihood Solutions:**
- Develop integrated programs linking housing with employment and community integration.
  - Increase financial allocations to housing programs to align with market conditions and expand eligibility criteria.
  - Enable access to loans on preferential terms, which would allow easier access to mortgages (backed by institutional guarantees).
  - Include vulnerable populations from host communities facing housing challenges in the program to promote social solidarity and equality.
  - Ensure a holistic approach to livelihood programmes, starting with career orientation and progressing to vocational training, soft skills development, psychosocial support, and entrepreneurship support aligned with labour market demands and leveraging public-private partnerships.
  - Further develop affordable and diversified housing models, including social housing solutions, also relevant in case of disaster risks and hazards.

## **2. PROTECTION, LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)**

### **2.1. SUMMARY OF THE SESSION**

Armenia offers a favourable legal framework for asylum seekers and refugees, supporting protection and access to education, social, and healthcare systems, as well as pathways to naturalization. Armenia has demonstrated commitment to upholding the socio-economic rights of refugees, including the principle of non-refoulement, access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, and the right to legal identity and documentation.

Practical challenges persist, including limited awareness among refugees about their rights, overburdened systems, insufficient state funding, gaps in reception capacity, and a lack of qualified staff such as lawyers, social workers and MHPSS specialist. Service quality,

coverage, sustainability, and long-term funding require significant improvement to fully realize the potential of the legal framework.

The Nexus approach in Armenia highlights the importance of strengthening comprehensive protection systems, enhancing legal support, documentation, targeted support to persons with specific needs, addressing gender-based violence, child protection and addressing mental health challenges.

Expanding social services and recruiting additional social workers are critical to meeting the growing demands of both refugees and host communities. Ensuring the community-based protection approach with the active participation of refugees in program design and service delivery through refugee-led organizations and community representatives.

Particular attention must be given to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied and separated children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and survivors of gender-based violence and trafficking. Child protection remains a priority, with targeted strategies needed to address labour exploitation, risk of trafficking, and gaps in education

Legal assistance is another cornerstone of the framework. Strengthening asylum systems and expediting legal processes ensures timely support for refugees. Mobile legal aid units can bridge accessibility gaps in remote areas, while specialized training in refugee law equips legal professionals to handle cases with expertise. Sustained funding models and leveraging technology for case management enhance the efficiency and reach of these services.

Mental health and psychosocial support require urgent attention. Developing a national MHPSS strategy and integrating it into primary healthcare systems provide a foundation for long-term recovery. Public awareness campaigns and community-based programs help reduce stigma, encouraging more individuals to seek mental health services. Expanding mobile teams and implementing school-based mental health initiatives address the needs of dispersed and vulnerable populations, particularly children and adolescents.

Integrated services that combine protection, legal, and mental health support ensure a holistic approach. Age-Gender-Diversity-sensitive frameworks and inclusive policies cater to the specific needs of marginalized groups, fostering social cohesion and resilience.

Reinforce the rights-based approach through participatory mechanisms, where refugees actively contribute to policy discussions and humanitarian response planning. Investing in long-term strategies and building capacity at all levels, to create a robust system that addresses immediate needs while laying the groundwork for sustainable development.

## **2.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **a) Strengthening Protection Systems:**

- Expand social services and train additional social workers to strengthen/adopt a human-centered approach.
- Prioritize protection of women by addressing issues like Domestic and Gender Based Violence
- Prioritize child protection, addressing issues such as labour, risks of trafficking, and education gaps.

- Conduct comprehensive needs assessments tailored to local contexts.
- Improve community-level engagement, particularly by involving women and local representatives in project designs.
- Consolidate accountability mechanisms, such as complaint and feedback systems, to ensure transparency in service delivery
- Incorporate an intersectional approach addressing the needs of refugees with specific needs such as those with disabilities, and older people.
- Promote community-driven solutions and refugee-led initiatives in program design, implementation and monitoring.
- Include disaster preparedness strategies in protection plans and strategies.
- Strengthen community-based referral networks to improve service accessibility, especially in rural areas.
- Reinforce local integration including language training for those who don't speak Armenian.

**b) Enhancing Legal Support:**

- Consolidate asylum systems and expedite legal aid processes.
- Expand mobile legal aid units to improve access in remote areas.
- Provide specialized training for legal professionals on international protection, the asylum system in Armenia and in refugee law.
- Expand legal awareness and culturally sensitive information sharing systems and networks, including in languages spoken by refugees and asylum seekers.
- Reform the overwhelmed judicial system, including increased financial resources, could enhance its efficiency and reduce the long waiting time.

**c) MHPSS Improvements:**

- Further develop the integration of MHPSS in the public health system.
- Reduce stigma through awareness campaigns and targeted community programs.
- Expand community-based MHPSS programs and mobile teams for rural areas.
- Expand school-based mental health services.
- Strengthen development initiatives in MHPSS.
- Develop a proactive strategy to promote male participation in MHPSS activities, notably by increasing program visibility
- Develop digital solutions for broader reach and sustainability.

- Provide comprehensive capacity-building programs for frontline workers, including healthcare professionals and teachers.
- Provide mental health support for frontline workers and caregivers to prevent burnout and secondary trauma.
- Introduce MHPSS-focused initiatives into disaster risk reduction and school environments.

**d) Integrated Services:**

- Ensure protection services include cash assistance, housing, healthcare and access to education and livelihood.
- Focus on age-gender-diversity-sensitive and inclusive frameworks for vulnerable populations.

**e) Long-term Strategies:**

- Invest in sustained funding models for legal aid and MHPSS programs.
- Leverage technology for case management and service delivery and strengthen information sharing platform to improve outreach.
- Establish policy frameworks for long-term refugee integration, including pathways to citizenship, access to employment, housing, social and protection rights, and self-reliance programs.
- Incorporate climate resilience and disaster preparedness into protection and solutions strategies to mitigate long-term risks.

**3. DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: NEXUS APPROACH AS A BACKBONE TO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

**3.1. SUMMARY OF THE SESSION**

Armenia’s disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts emphasize the need for increased investment, data-driven strategies, and community engagement. Upgrading infrastructure to modern safety standards and enhancing funding for DRR initiatives, especially in densely populated and high-risk areas, are critical steps.

Accurate data collection and comprehensive risk assessments enable the development of targeted strategies, addressing vulnerabilities effectively. As developed in the draft law, DRM strategy and action plans can be further improved to better reflect dedicated solutions for people with disabilities, pregnant women, children and other vulnerable groups.

Local capacity-building is integral to DRR; training and regular disaster simulation exercises empower community representatives and local authorities. Contextualized and Inclusive disasters response plans can ensure prompt action, and that no one is left behind including people with specific needs



Public awareness campaigns, enhanced disaster education and disaster risk management into school curricula would better cultivate a culture of preparedness from a young age. The development of a dedicated DRR subject in the curriculum of general schools, imparting knowledge about personal safety, first aid, resilience and disaster preparedness, would empower children to protect themselves and others in challenging circumstances.

Technology and innovation play a transformative role in DRR. Expanding access to early warning systems, introducing new channels for crisis communication, modernizing disaster education, and leveraging the capacity of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRRNP / ARNAP) facilitate centralized coordination and stakeholder engagement. These efforts must be complemented by equitable resource allocation and innovative financing mechanisms, bridging gaps in funding and sustaining long-term initiatives.

By advocating for multi-sectoral collaboration and fostering partnerships across government, private, and civil society sectors, Armenia can enhance its resilience to natural and man-made hazards. These measures, combined with adaptive learning from past experiences, position the country to better withstand future challenges.

### **3.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **a) Increased Investment:**

- Enhance funding for DRR infrastructure, particularly in high-risk areas.
- Upgrade outdated buildings and develop resilient infrastructure.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships to mobilize resources for DRR.
- Increase resource allocation to consolidated communities which bare the primary responsibilities for DRR.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms such as parametric insurance, catastrophe bonds.

#### **b) Data and Risk Assessments:**

- Improve data collection, risk mapping and crisis communication capabilities.
- Conduct comprehensive risk assessments to guide targeted DRR strategies.
- Strengthen disaster preparedness through region-specific risk scenario and maps.

#### **c) Community and Local Capacity:**

- Promote a culture of safety, enhance disaster education in schools and kindergartens as well as include it in mandatory teacher training.
- Strengthen local DRR mechanisms through training, simulations with whole-of-society engagement, including educational and health facilities, and service providers.

- Integrate DRR strategies and disaster risk management, climate and risk assessments into consolidated communities' development plans.
- Enhance the capacity of health workers for DRM and patient evacuation.
- Develop synergies and coordination between central regional, consolidated communities and local institutions and disaster risk management plans.
- Ensure stronger involvement of vulnerable groups in the development of community DRM plans for to suitably address their specific needs.
- Support the development of knowledge and technical capacity within communities for risk assessment and disaster preparedness planning.

**d) Collaboration and Awareness:**

- Leverage the capacity of DRRNP as a national coordination body for DRR
- Improve multi-sectoral coordination among stakeholders.
- Promote public awareness campaigns.

**e) Technology and Innovation:**

- Expand access to early warning systems and other DRR technologies.
- Modernize disaster education (through virtual reality simulations for example).
- Explore new channels for crisis communication for broader and faster coverage

**f) Sustainability and Inclusivity:**

- Advocate for equitable resource allocation and innovative financing mechanisms.
- Ensure inclusive DRR strategies addressing social vulnerabilities,
- Address infrastructure vulnerability to disaster and respect with the building codes.