

# ARMENIA

## INTER-AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

1- 31 March 2021



### KEY FIGURES

**USD 62.1 M**

Total Financial Requirements for the Inter-Agency Response Plan (from October 2021 – end of June 2021)

**66,051**

Refugee-like population from NK  
(Source: *Armenian Migration Services*, 24 March)

**85%**

Women and children among spontaneous arrivals

**18,708**

Individuals reached by the monthly food assistance

**1,796**

Persons reached through Protection Monitoring exercise

**995**

Beneficiaries reached through education activities

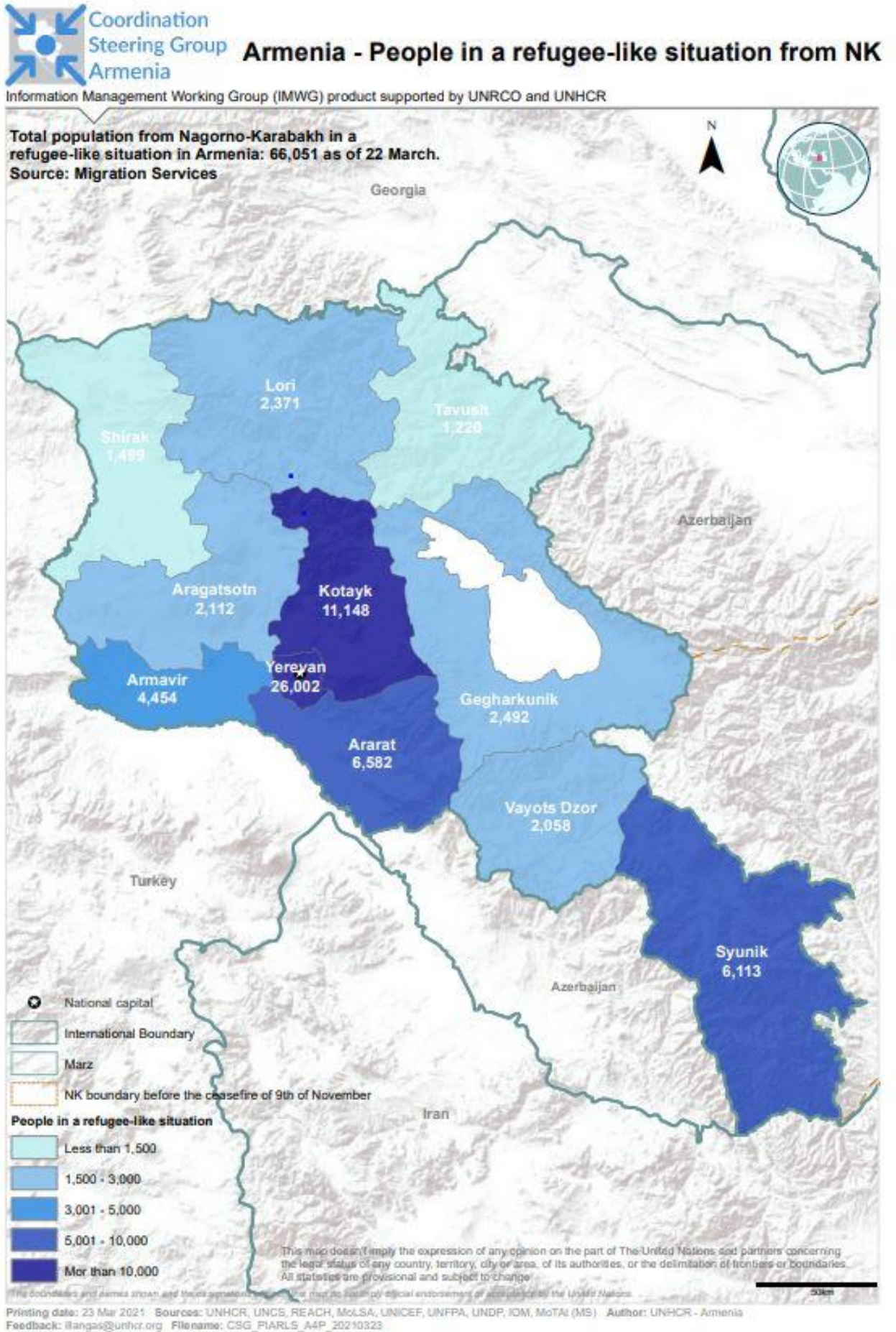
**28,000**

Persons reached through winter clothes distributed

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The UN system in Armenia continues to operate with a coordination structure put in place under the lead of the Resident Coordinator's Office and UNHCR to coordinate humanitarian efforts and maximize the efficiency of the response in Armenia to the crisis in Nagorno Karabakh (NK).
- Daily monitoring of people departing from Yerevan to Stepanakert is ongoing since 14 November 2020. 100 key informant interviews were conducted at the departure point in Yerevan. According to UNHCR's departure monitoring as of end of March, an estimated 26,766 individuals travelled to NK since mid-November, but the nature and sustainability of these returns are yet to be determined. The departure monitoring has identified certain gaps in the way returns are organized, and UNHCR continued its dialogue with the authorities to address them.
- Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) with ICRC support has started disbursement of cash support to host families in Tavush and Syunik marzes, in alignment with Government-led cash programme and within signed MoU and agreement with Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), Social Security Service and banks.
- UNHCR through its partners, ARCS and Mission Armenia distributed essential household items to 9,791 persons in Kotayk, Syunik, Armavir marzes and Yerevan municipality.
- Aleppo NGO provided scholarships to 40 students living in a refugee-like situation to support their studies at Armenian universities.
- In order to respond to the need for free medication and supplies at primary healthcare level, WHO has donated 59 standardized drug modules (set packages to respond to non-communicable diseases) to the MoH to help provide free non-communicable disease medication to up to 66,000 individuals.
- In March 2021, two Early Recovery WG partners, UNDP and UNIDO, reached a total of 4,195 individuals through one or a combination of activities such as livelihoods support to small business, restoration of social infrastructure and amenities, COVID-19 response, veteran support, social cohesion, peacebuilding and leadership development.
- On 31 March the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Armenia launched a 'humanitarian appeal' requesting assistance in Nagorno-Karabakh. The appeals list five priority areas for humanitarian support that include cash assistance to displaced persons from in and around NK, to hosting families in NK and Armenia and to carry out temporary public works to address unemployment. The total amount requested for cash assistance programs is about USD 45M. Shelter solutions and WASH assistance for affected families in NK are the other two priorities.
- UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM delivered their interim report of the CERF implementation status.

Figure 1: Map of distribution of people in a refugee-like situation from NK in Armenia



# OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

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On 27 September 2020, hostilities broke out along the line of contact (LoC) and quickly expanded to other areas in and around Nagorno Karabakh (NK), until a nine-point tripartite statement was signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Federation of Russia during the night of 9-10 November. Six weeks of conflict resulted in significant civilian casualties and destruction of many houses and public infrastructure in the NK conflict zone, including schools, roads and communication networks. As a result, it is estimated that at the peak of the crisis the majority of the population living in and around NK had fled to Armenia.

According to the Migration Services (MS) that is under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MoTAI) and as of 24 March, some 66,051 persons are still in a refugee-like situation in Armenia, while 24,707 have registered in NK for cash/assistance. Distribution of population across the marzes are illustrated in *Figure 1* above. The MS data is the most comprehensive refugee-like population dataset that is available to humanitarian assistance partners. However, population estimates from other sources such as, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), “de-facto authorities” in NK, regional/local authorities, non-governmental organizations, etc. put the actual number in Armenia to be much lower. The Information Management Working Group (IMWG) will continue to communicate with relevant sources and humanitarian partners to triangulate and verify the population figures.

The 9 November tripartite ceasefire agreement is currently holding with no confirmed incidents being reported from the LoC. Despite the presence of several checkpoints, movement between Armenia and NK is relatively unrestricted for people living in a refugee-like situation, with Government of Armenia providing free bus services. At the onset of the spring season and given the relative calm in many areas of NK, the number of refugee-like population returning remains steady, yet modest. Number of individuals directly observed boarding buses for NK stands at 26,766 individuals, but nature and sustainability of those who have traveled to NK are yet to be determined. On average, a couple of buses a day departed from Yerevan to NK in March. Furthermore, of the 66,051 persons in a refugee-like situation in Armenia, as cited by MS, it is estimated that 24,615 persons are from the areas returned under Azerbaijani control and therefore unlikely to return to their place of origin.

On the political front, the month of March started with rallies and counter rallies by supporters of government as well as from the opposition. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, and they dissipated as the month wore on. After consulting with the two opposition parliamentary parties, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, on 18 March announced that Armenia would hold early parliamentary elections on 20 June.

Despite the fragile socioeconomic situation that has been compounded by the impact of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>, the Government of Armenia (GoA), both at national and local levels, continued to respond to the needs of new arrivals, providing critical support. Among others, support from the host government included provision of communal shelters, health services and cash assistance programmes. On 31st March 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia made a Humanitarian Appeal addressed to international partners to respond the humanitarian and socio-economic needs of people affected by the hostilities in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>2</sup> The Appeal calls for “urgent and comprehensive actions” to provide support to affected NK population by all humanitarian actors. However, it does not differentiate between the refugee-like population in Armenia and returnees in NK. For the latter population, Armenian inter-agency response lacks jurisdiction.

Following the renewed fighting on 27 September 2020, the UN Secretary-General called for unimpeded access to humanitarian workers and delivery of humanitarian assistance and services to civilians in and around the NK conflict zone. Since the 9 November trilateral ceasefire statement, the UN has reiterated its readiness to deploy an initial independent inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission to NK and other conflict-affected areas. The UN continues to engage with all concerned parties to secure access to NK and discussions on the specific parameters and timing of the initial planned scoping mission continue.

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<sup>1</sup> 7 day daily average case was recorded at 922 on 31st March. Source: John Hopkins COVID-19 data.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2021/03/31/fm\\_humanitarian\\_appeal/10876](https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2021/03/31/fm_humanitarian_appeal/10876).

# UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS



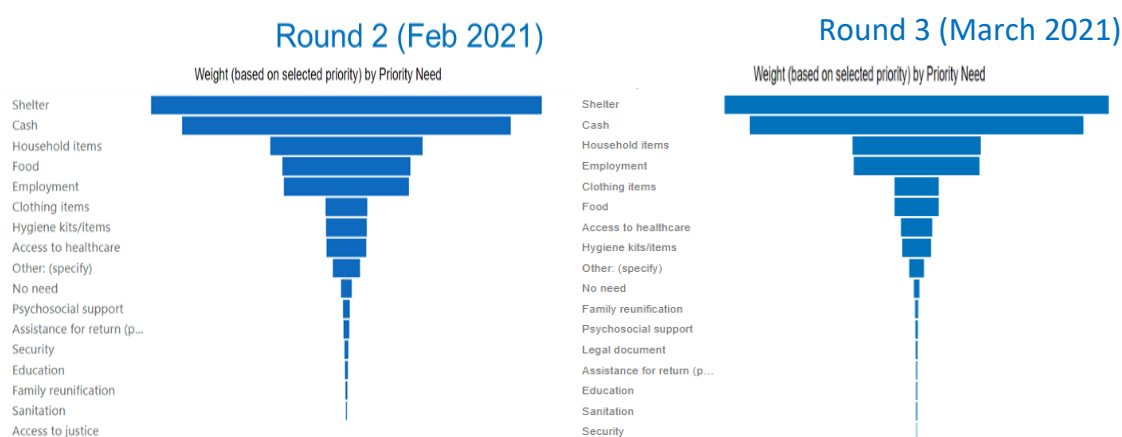
## Current Situation

The Protection Working Group (PWG) continued to coordinate protection activities at the national, regional and local levels, organizing interventions, seeking consensus on issues, creating partnerships and linkages for better prioritization of available resources with an overall goal of enhancing the protection of persons in a refugee-like situation from Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). The situation remains fluid and requires continuous monitoring at all levels.

## Identified Priority Needs

The results of on-going protection monitoring have identified similar trends between the second and third rounds of protection monitoring, with shelter, cash, household items, employment, clothing items, food, access to healthcare and hygiene kits/items as the main needs among the persons in a refugee-like situation from in and around NK in order of priority.

Figure 2: Comparison of priority needs between the second and rounds of Protection Monitoring



As evident from Figure 2 above, the top three needs of refugee-like person have not changed since February. However, unlike in the previous round, more families prioritized employment and clothing items over food, which is an indicator for refugee-like persons preparing a longer term stay in Armenia.

## Achievements and Impact

- The protection monitoring exercise with a new updated individual/household level questionnaire has been conducted since the beginning of February 2021. In March, 1,796 individuals in a refugee-like situation were reached through protection monitoring exercise, of which 445 persons were living in collective/transitional sites, where site level assessment was conducted and the remaining individuals were reached through protection monitoring household interviews, during field visits or by phone. 704 individuals were identified for referrals through protection monitoring household interviews and more than 300 individuals were referred for specialized support. 2,855 individuals were reached through the distribution of information leaflets and through awareness raising campaigns on protection topics. Protection monitoring exercise also included key informant interviews in collective/transitional shelters and settlements. These interviews were conducted with local authorities, social workers or community leaders were aimed at providing indications on return intentions, living conditions, access to services, financial challenges, and social cohesion and security. In the collective/transitional shelter, referrals were made to support some of the collective shelters with renovation and in-kind assistance (*refer to Shelter/NFI section for details on distribution and shelter repair works*).
- Daily monitoring of departures from Yerevan to Stepanakert is ongoing since 14 November 2020. Since mid-November, UNHCR has observed some 26,766 individuals boarding the buses as of end of March, during monitoring

departures to NK, but the nature and sustainability of these returns are yet to be determined. The monitoring is focused on the organization of the transport, observation of the profile of individuals going to NK and their possible specific needs, use of COVID-19 preventive measures, collection of individual information through interviews at the departure place. In March, 100 key informant interviews were conducted at the departure point in Yerevan.

- In March, 53 structured phone interviews were conducted with those who have returned to NK to better understand challenges, living condition and protection concerns. Results are still being analyzed and will be shared end of April.
- In March, UNHCR conducted missions to Syunik and Kotayk marzes. Purposes of the visit were: to conduct of post-distribution monitoring of recently distributed NFIs to the population in the refugee-like situation; to assess the overall situation in the marzes in relations with the displacements from NK and the on-going response; and to assess and identify protection needs and gaps as well as challenges and priority needs of the local authorities, border guards, NGOs and persons in a refugee-like situation. UNHCR also met with representatives of Goris, Kapan, Kotayk municipalities, the Governor of Syunik marz, Mayor of Hrazdan town, Border Guards HQ in Kapan town responsible for the newly established border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, UNHCR NGO partners and other local community-based organizations. UNHCR met with people in a refugee-like situation residing in collective shelters and private accommodations in order to identify their protection needs and vulnerabilities in order to adjust current protection response for the remaining of the 2021 and prepare for 2022 planning exercise. Border monitoring was another component of the mission, which included detailed discussions with border guards.
- 1,168 individuals benefitted from Community Support Initiatives (CSIs), which are small-scale projects of a different nature, from knitting to art therapy. They were conducted by Mission Armenia NGO.
- 503 persons were referred to local self-government authorities, NGOs and polyclinics with issues related to health care, cash assistance and first necessity items by Mission Armenia NGO.

### Remaining Gaps

- The monitoring of people departing to NK has identified certain gaps in the way bus services are organized, in particular lack of boarding priority and due considerations for persons with specific needs, absence of safety and security measures (presence of the police and ambulance), and COVID-19 preventive measures, which are not promoted and followed.
- The sustainability of private assistance currently being provided by host communities is a challenge in the medium to longer term and a more systematized approach is required to sustain interest and ability to host displaced persons.
- Growing concerns are being reported among the displaced population, in particular those who arrived from regions returned under Azerbaijan control, about their status and rights in Armenia.

### Recommended Action

- ⇒ Continue protection and return monitoring activities, in the coming weeks continue to focus on collective/transitional shelter visits and on self-referrals through the hotline.
- ⇒ Strengthen communication with communities and raise awareness on access to basic rights, available services and assistance programs.
- ⇒ Continue to identify if people living in a refuge like situation have problems with accessing state assistance programs and applications processing as well as access to other rights and services; provide individual legal assistance and support and undertake advocacy to address systemic issues.
- ⇒ Engage and support the Government on the development of a mid and long-term response strategy with primary focus on persons with specific needs and promotion of sustainable development solutions, focusing on those who will not be able to return.

## Child Protection Sub-Working Group

### Current Situation

All the organizations included in the Child Protection SWG continued interventions in respective areas, that is, direct service provision through child-friendly spaces, MHPSS and development of family-based alternative care system for children deprived of parental care among others.

## Identified Priority Needs

Lack of psychosocial support and other community-based services/child-friendly spaces remain one of the major needs of the affected children, parents and caregivers. The children from NK miss their schools, friends and homes and show signs of trauma due to the experience of war, stress of displacement and loss of family members. 85% of the families reached declared some form of stress mostly related to the conflict and the general loss of hope. Children are among the age group that are particularly affected by the displacement and uncertainty surrounding their future. Awareness on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and available services are poor, with MHPSS is not always being prioritized by the affected parents/caregivers. The burden of stress caused by the conflict and the COVID-19 situation increases the risk of violence against children, especially emotional abuse and neglect, as well as gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse.

## Achievements and Impact

- More than 80 parents and caregivers participated in positive parenting sessions on child health care and GBV organized by SCI.
- Within the framework of SCI projects 480 children benefitted from Child Friendly Spaces. They also participated in English classes organized in cooperation with American University of Armenia. Computer classes were also provided.
- UNICEF through partners conducted capacity building trainings for social workers that engage directly with refugee-like persons to help the former effectively respond to the issues of children and families; to promote cooperation among stakeholders; and to prevent professional burn-out and encourage self-care.
- UNICEF's partners held info sessions with the refugee-like children with the aim of increasing their access to available child protection services.
- Throughout the reporting period, in close collaboration with the direct service providers in communities, needs-based support packages were provided to refugee-like persons based on their specific needs.
- The coverage of the helpline for different groups of professionals has been expanded.
- Recruitment and training of foster families for emergency alternative care arrangements continued.
- An e-library was established covering child psychology; educational psychology; and special educational needs. Likewise, an e-learning platform, which has 9 modules covering two courses on Child psychotherapy and Organizing the work with children, for specialists has been developed.
- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) teams in regional centers were established with the aim of providing timely psychosocial response to children and their families in case of emergencies.
- Special materials, both print and video were developed for parents, adolescents and children from vulnerable families from Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor and Syunik marzes, aimed at self-care, self-support during COVID-19, as well as, in case of parents, positive parenting skills at emergency situations.

## Remaining Gaps

- There is a need to strengthen capacity and coverage of the local care and protection services and protection monitoring to ensure timely identification and referral of cases. Shortage of community based care, protection services and relevant child-friendly spaces, as well as stigma and harmful norms regarding mental health services is another contributor to vulnerability, which results in low resilience and the danger to resort to negative coping strategies, including institutionalization of children.
- The capacity and resources of the government in protecting and improving the mental health and psychosocial well-being is limited.

## Recommended Action

- ⇒ Capacity building for professionals engaged in state-run or state-supported organizations delivering mental health and psychosocial support services should be organized through a combination of online and face-to-face training, coaching and mentoring activities. E-learning platform established earlier should be made available for all professionals to make use of the learning and training materials developed so far.

### **Current Situation**

According to the ICRC situation analysis and interviews conducted in bordering communities of Tavush, Gegarkhunik, Syunik and Vayots Dzor, there might be unidentified mined fields and contaminated areas following the military hostilities in NK conflict zone. The loss of previously available agricultural land and territories for farming in some communities as a result of the recent war, is perceived to put pressure on people to enter and work on new potentially hazardous areas, mainly for agriculture, cattle herding and herbs picking.

Psychological state of children continues to be a concern in the visited communities. Villages were either under direct shelling and shooting during the escalation of hostilities, or they heard and felt the military actions. All participants indicated increased need for PSS interventions to help children to overcome trauma, stress and anxiety and decrease the negative effects of those factors on the learning process.

Sanitation-hygiene conditions were also reported as a common problem. In visited schools, there was no running water or latrines. Both students and school staff struggled with proper sanitation for effective COVID-19 prevention and control. Lack of WASH facilities affect attendance and smooth operation of schools.

### **Identified Priority Needs**

As there is a lack of knowledge and information among children and adults on Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and safe behavior, there is a need for more community and school based EORE activities. Students living near the Line of Contact (LoC) also need psychological support.

Humanitarian Partners also reported that learning supplies and Information and Communication Technology (ITC) were needed to improve access and meaningful participation in schooling for the refugee-like children.

Schools need proper WASH facilities.

### **Achievements and Impact**

- Aleppo NGO provided scholarships to 40 students living in a refugee-like situation to support their studies at Armenian universities. The selection of the students was based on the nature of their displacement (short or long term), education merit and vulnerability.
- 280 displaced children received school bags with stationary, tablets with sim cards in Gegharkunik, Armavir and Syunik marzes.
- 143 school children benefited from EORE sessions in target communities of Syunik, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Tavush.
- Some 412 children received psychological support and services.
- 120 children continued to benefit from 11 early learning services in Tavush, Kotayk, Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor marzes.
- 44 children, including 25 refugee-like children from NK and surrounding areas, with moderate and severe disabilities were provided with supporting devices, comprehensive services, as well as support to learning activities. Those who returned to NK continued to receive online consultations.
- 1,326 preschool teachers were trained on "*Provision of emergency care, development and education services*" as part of the World Bank emergency programme. The main topics covered include safe and effective ways to provide learning services to preschool and kindergartens during COVID-19 pandemic; ways to deal with stress and adapting to education process; anger prevention and control among children and adults.
- Three modules were developed for preschools. They are emergency management plan for childcare facility; multi hazard emergency management plan for childcare facility addressing earthquakes and conflicts; and universal emergency plan for home-based care for children, whose parents are essential frontline workers and cannot take care for their children.

### **Remaining Gaps**

- Scale up of EORE programmes.
- ICT supplies to improve access and participation in school activities.

- Improvement of WASH facilities and hygiene conditions, which is an emerging need identified as a result of in-depth assessment of bordering community schools that host displaced children.
- MHPSS initiatives in schools.

### Recommended Action

- ⇒ Continued provision of learning supplies and ICT. Integration of EORE into the school curriculum. Integrate WASH in school activities and continue to provide psychological support to children.



## Shelter and NFI Working Group

### Current Situation

Shelter/NFI WG partners conducted shelter repairs and distributed, among others, warm clothes, cooking kits, hygiene kits, blankets, and other bedding items throughout March. Much of the Shelter/NFI response are planned to be implemented using cash-modality and are awaiting government approval.

### Identified Priority Needs

UNHCR visited Kotayk marz and held meeting with families living in refugee-like situation; high-ranking officials at the Governor's Office; senior municipal staff of Hrazdan municipality, including the Mayor; and civil society/NGOs supporting refugee-like population. The stakeholders expressed that rent was being unaffordable for the displaced persons and there were also instances where they were asked to vacate their homes by the landlords. The need for rental subsidy and affordable shelter were also voiced by refugee-like persons during monitoring visits to Syunik marz.

Refugee like persons in Kapan municipality of Syunik marz identified foldable beds, bedding sets, mattresses and quilts, footwear (especially for kids), clothing items, and hygiene items as NFIs that they need.

### Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR, through partner ARCS distributed winter clothes to some 28,000 persons living in a refugee-like situation in Yerevan in March. So far, 43,600 persons have received more than 53,000 pieces of warm clothes. Furthermore, in March 9,344 blankets were also distributed in Yerevan by ARCS, in response to the cold weather.
- UNHCR through its partners, ARCS and Mission Armenia distributed essential household items to 9,791 persons in Kotayk, Syunik, Armavir marzes and Yerevan municipality. The partners distributed 4,000 kettles, 841 cooking kits, 3,088 jerry cans, 1,324 pillows, bed linen sets and towels, 1,000 solar lamps, and 12 gas stoves.
- During the reporting period, NGO Mission Armenia, on behalf UNHCR, started repairing 6 collective shelters, which will benefit 242 persons. It also distributed jerry cans, gas stoves and cooking kits to 791 refugee-like persons living in the collective shelters.
- 696 families received NFI assistance in the form of bed linens, school and hygiene items. 160 families received gift cards (AMD 15,000) for purchasing clothes and shoes by NGO Mission Armenia.

### Remaining Gaps

- During the monitoring of winter clothes distribution in Goris and Kapan municipalities of Syunik marz, it was observed that local authorities themselves did not have the capacity to conduct uninterrupted and quick distribution. Community based NGOs, youth groups, members of refugee community were not engaged in the distribution process in Goris. Evidence from other distribution sites suggests that by involving of local and beneficiary groups, local authorities are able share tasks and improve communication with the beneficiaries resulting in smoother distributions.

### Recommended Action

- ⇒ Continue to work directly with the social workers/municipalities and building their capacity to identify the needs of families and support with a quick distribution of items.



## Current Situation

The GoA has rolled out 18 cash support initiatives. These programmes range from provision of recurrent support equivalent to the minimum wage (68,000 AMD) predominantly to women and children, the elderly and persons with disabilities in refugee-like situation; one-time support to persons displaced from territories returned under Azerbaijan control or to those whose properties have become uninhabitable; periodic support to families and legal entities hosting refugee-like population; support to other persons affected by the military hostilities which erupted in NK conflict zone on 27 September; reimbursement of tuition fees; one-time support for preschool age children; two cash for work programmes (public works and for gaining work experience); support to injured servicemen and support to employers employing injured and wounded servicemen. The overall financial requirements for these programmes constitute more than USD 96M.

Overall, 7 partners have planned for cash support (food and nutrition, shelter/NFIs, early recovery and multipurpose) targeting approximately 52,484 beneficiaries (72% displaced, 28% host community) with a total budget of USD 7.4M.

MoLSA has finalized fieldwork for rapid needs assessment of affected families. Once the data is analyzed, this will inform further cash based and in-kind support programmes.

The Cash SWG has regular participation from the MoLSA, advisor to Minister and Cash Focal Point, ensuring constant communication and feedback on various Government cash support programmes, as well as ways that partners can contribute to those programmes.

## Identified Priority Needs

The GoA has issued a Humanitarian Appeal to all embassies and development partners in Armenia, outlining priority needs of the displaced population in both NK and Armenia and underscoring the importance of predictable cash support. The programmes for recurrent 68,000 support<sup>3</sup>, host families<sup>4</sup> and cash for work schemes were priorities with a financial gap for support of about USD 47M covering both NK and Armenia; however, the inter-agency response will prioritize those currently residing in Armenia.

Cash assistance was ranked second among the most urgent needs by families in refugee-like situation (after shelter) as per the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment in December by REACH and by February and March rounds of protection monitoring findings by UNHCR, as their already limited resources were diminishing, their basic income security has been shattered and they fear becoming a burden on their hosts. Host families have also mentioned cash as the primary need, considering the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the arrival of the displaced population, who have placed additional burden on host communities in terms of their capacity to address their needs, and maintain order and social cohesion.

To complement government's cash programmes, special needs of children, including children with disabilities, children under 5, female-headed households and others, as well as other vulnerable groups should be considered in the design of cash interventions, including payment modalities.

A sound disaggregated beneficiary dataset by location is quintessential in determining eligibility criteria and designing cash interventions.

## Achievements and Impact

- Following a series of consultation processes with the members of the Cash SWG, the Government has approved special clauses on provision of support by national and international partners and individuals complementing Government-led cash support interventions, including written consent by MoLSA, bilateral/trilateral agreements with the Unified Social Service, which will replace Social Security Service and State Employment Agency as of 01 April 2021, and bank, as well as beneficiary data sharing. Applications for the programmes are predominantly submitted online through the Unified Social Service, while the distribution is done via post offices or banks, with the latter becoming the preferred modality of support. A system of grievance/feedback was already developed as part of online

<sup>3</sup> As per the GoA Humanitarian Appeal, both refugee-like persons from in and around NK living in Armenia and those who have returned to NK are eligible for this cash support.

<sup>4</sup> According to the GoA Humanitarian Appeal, hosting families in Armenia will receive AMD 30,000 per hosted refugee-like person and families in NK will receive AMD 45,000 per hosted displaced person.

applications to address individual cases and complaints. Moreover, individual partners are establishing their own hotlines. Around 80% of beneficiaries have already given their consent during online applications, enabling the Unified Social Service/MoLSA to share beneficiary data with partners. Sample MoU, bank agreement and non-disclosure terms were finalized jointly by the Group and MoLSA. This will enable harmonized and aligned support by development partners to Government-led programmes through various delivery mechanisms.

- ICRC, through Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), has already started disbursement to host families in Tavush and Syunik regions, based on signed MoU and tripartite agreement with MoLSA, Social Security Agency/Unified Social Service and banks in aligned with Government-led programmes.

### Remaining Gaps

- As voiced by the GoA, there is a financial gap for financing of Government-led cash support programmes, thus more involvement of partners is encouraged.
- Challenges include the relatively limited scope of participation of group members and beneficiaries in the design of cash support programmes and determination of transfer modalities, which create challenges in finalizing the MoUs and agreements and identification of beneficiaries. Moreover, negotiations of MoUs and agreements take time, especially for UN agencies, which require development and acceptance of special clauses by the GoA.
- Assurance is needed that the persons supported by the UN are indeed on the territory of Armenia, considering the jurisdiction of agencies is to assist persons in a refugee-like situation in Armenia. The Government is open to dialogue and consultation and flexible to the extent possible in accommodating requests, including cross-checking of information and verification of beneficiaries as per the provided beneficiary lists.

### Recommended Action

- ⇒ Regular communication with MoLSA, MFA, the Deputy Prime Minister's (DPM) office, CSG and Cash SWG on next procedural steps, including removal of potential challenges for cash rollout and support in conclusion of MoUs and agreements.
- ⇒ Receive more clarity from MoLSA and DPM's office on the number of individuals/households affected by NK conflict and in need of cash support, especially those who are currently in Armenia.
- ⇒ Discuss challenges in concluding MoUs and tripartite agreements with UN agencies and other partners, including development of lessons learnt. Finalize all clearances for signature of MoUs between MoLSA and WFP, UNICEF, Save the Children and ACTED in the month of April.
- ⇒ Continuously provide information to donors on the developed mechanism and approaches for multi-purpose cash interventions complementing Government-led initiatives.
- ⇒ Finalize formal Standard Operating Procedures for supporting Government-led cash support programmes as part of the Cash SWG.



## Food Security and Nutrition Working Group

### Current Situation

Five Food Security and Nutrition WG partners, Action Against Hunger, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Progressive Youth, Care and WFP, are active across six marzes across Armenia. In March, food assistance reached only 36% of those estimated as being in need, demonstrating large gaps in the response. FAO and WFP are engaged in programmes that protect existing food generating assets that are critical to food security in the medium term in Syunik and Gegharkunik marzes. In the Tegh community in Syunik, WFP is supporting families to adapt agricultural practices to increase productivity and profitability. Activities include working with 15 smallholder farmers on the productivity and profitability of harvests. Sustainability is ensured by simultaneously investing in community infrastructure to alleviate community budgetary costs. Savings are then invested in agricultural development in coming years.

### Identified Priority Needs

Save lives through support to food access for food insecure refugee-like population from NK and surrounding areas and the communities hosting them.

Ensure adequate nutrition for at risk groups, including pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers and children. 7,609 persons have been identified as at-risk population needing assistance.

Protect, reconstitute, or create the means of existence of displaced and host communities in fragile environments.

### **Achievements and Impact**

- Five Food Security and Nutrition Working Group partners reached 18,708 individuals with in-kind food assistance in March 2021 in six marzes across Armenia. Those reached include individuals in refugee-like situations and individuals from households hosting them.
  - Action Against Hunger reached 2,000 individuals in Ararat and Yerevan with food assistance packages.
  - The Armenian General Benevolent Union reached 5,247 people in Ararat, Armavir, Gegharkunik, and Vayots Dzor with food assistance packages.
  - Armenian Progressive youth in collaboration with Care Caucasus reached 972 people with food assistance in Kotayk.
  - WFP reached 10,489 people in Kotayk and Yerevan with food assistance.

### **Remaining Gaps**

- WFP VAM team have supported the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group to better understand the changing needs of the affected population. The results will be shared next month.
- Specialized assistance targeting at-risk groups of malnutrition, including women, children and elderly was reported as wholly unfunded by the two Food Security and Nutrition Working Group members (Action Against Hunger and UNICEF) actively fundraising for this type of assistance. This leaves significant gaps in this type of activity.

### **Recommended Action**

- ⇒ Advocacy and fundraising to increase support for nutrition assistance targeting at-risk groups, including women, children and elderly by UNICEF and Action Against Hunger.



## **Health Working Group**

### **Current Situation**

Partners of the Health WG together with the Ministry of Health continue providing services to refugee-like population and host community through primary health care provision, risk communication and community engagement, procurement and distribution of equipment and free drugs and other medical supplies. Under the initiatives of the GoA, primary health services are provided free of charge to all citizens of Armenia and refugee-like population from NK. Under the government scheme, the refugee-like population can visit primary health facilities around their temporary residence and be enrolled immediately without any special registration procedures.

Whilst there is limited information on the actual health needs of the persons in a refugee-like situation, it is known that these populations have mainly been registered within the health system through primary health care and are eligible for services available for the population of Armenia. However, given the seriously underfinanced health system in Armenia, economic and political crisis following NK conflict and in the situation of a COVID-19 pandemic, the package of health services available for the refugee-like persons and for the hosting populations is very limited. Some of the partners providing mobile primary health services to the refugee-like persons reported serious lack of basic medications and supplies as well as lack of access to specialized health services especially in the rural regions of Armenia.

In March, Health partners continued strengthen partnership with other health actors and plan future course of action. UNDP is piloting mobile health care services in Amasia and Arpi municipalities of Shirak marz to bring the primary health care service closer to the residents. Based on the high interest and need of such service in other municipalities, mobile testing services will be upscaled within UNDP and expanded to one more municipality. IOM has contracted the Seda Ghazarian Mental Health Foundation (Intra Mental Health Centre) to undertake the treatment and follow up of MHPSS cases referred by the Mobile Teams. The center will provide specialized, quality psychological and psychiatric services to those affected by mental health issues. IOM is also working with the Armenian EyeCare Project to refer individuals diagnosed with eye disorders to one of the Regional Eye Centers (REC). The RECs are very well equipped and can support

people referred by the mobile teams with eyeglasses, diagnoses, cataract surgery, diabetic retinopathy laser treatment and other disorders for free.

Given the severity of community transmission of COVID-19, all health partners are aware and remain vigilant. Activities are planned and executed with stringent infection prevention and control measures in place.

### **Identified Priority Needs**

Mapping of available services was highlighted as a priority for the month, and two mapping activities are currently underway. Whilst the need for ensuring access to right information for beneficiaries especially those in remote areas is evident, the operationalization of such is more challenging than anticipated given the rapid changes in activities, number of actors and the high mobility of the displaced population itself.

Partners have identified the following needs and are responding across the country:

- MHPSS provision at all levels and throughout all walks of society, predominantly amongst the refugee-like population.
- Access and care provision for the most vulnerable groups outside of state-free care provision.
- Access (through affordability) to specialized medical services at hospitals.
- Access to health care services and the delivery of full range care provision in remote areas.
- Establishment of community rehabilitation services in rural settings to support patients with disabilities discharged from the hospitals.
- Identification and strengthening of local capacities to best respond to health-related needs.

### **Achievements and Impact**

- In order to respond to the need for free medication and supplies at primary healthcare level, WHO has donated 59 standardized drug modules to the MoH to help provide free non-communicable disease medication to up to 66,000 individuals. Another 20 basic modules of Interagency Health Emergency Kits (IHEKs) procured by WHO were distributed by the MoH to 20 health facilities across the country. A further 2,000 glucometers (for blood sugar monitoring) were procured by WHO for the MoH to support health care services for the refugee-like population and their hosts alike.
- UNICEF supported the Armenian health system with procurement of required equipment for health facilities in 5 regions where refugee-like people are located. The establishment of pediatric teams for screenings of vulnerable children will start in April.
- Project Hope distributed 30 Essential Health Packs to the MoH to support up to 27,000 individuals to access essential drugs (blood pressure and diabetes medication, analgesics, anti-inflammatories, etc.) at primary health care facilities.
- WHO together with the MoH completed its mission on the nationwide assessment of trauma rehabilitation services. Among the main findings was the serious unmet need of community rehabilitation services, especially in rural areas. Based on the results mission and reported need to strengthen services by partners, MoH and MoLSA, a coordination group involving of all of the above will be established to work jointly on development and implementation of a roadmap for rehabilitation services in the country.
- Under the CERF project, IOM's mobile clinic teams comprising a physician, pediatrician, psychologist, sonographer, and nurse/laboratory visited 20 communities and conducted 1,000 PHC consultations in Lori and Armavir marzes.
- The Health WG actors continued to provide MHPSS services in March. The Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) psychologists provided psychological assistance and psychological first aid to affected population, including wounded soldiers, their relatives, refugee-like persons and to ARCS hotline applicants. ARCS trained volunteers continued working with children living in temporary shelters in schools, kindergartens and hotels, organizing their daily lives and providing psychological support. The IOM mobile clinic teams have PFA-trained psychologists on board to ensure that MHPSS issues are identified and referred to appropriate support services and follow up.
- MHPSS actors also provided capacity building assistance in March. ARCS provided PSS training to 30 volunteers from Vardenis, Gegharquniq, and Shirak. Likewise, it also provided Training of Trainers to 10 individuals in psychological first aid to spread knowledge and skills in schools and kindergartens. Working with local partners, Médecins du Monde (MdM) continued building capacity in key health areas, including Gender Based Violence (GBV) and MHPSS with refugee-like persons in Kotayk, Armavir, Ararat marzes and in Yerevan.

- IOM has identified a large quantity of people suffering from thyroid disorders and adequate follow up treatment. As laboratory test results are essential for proper treatment, partnership with the Izmirlian Foundation was set up to support the beneficiaries with free blood tests. In March, blood test for 21 beneficiaries were done by Izmirlian Hospital.

### Remaining Gaps

- Limited data on actual health and mental health needs of the refugee-like population.
- As the estimates of numbers of refugee-like persons residing in Armenia vary within government sources, Health WG partners are struggling to calculate and target their activities.
- Due to misperception, people seeking MHPSS run the risk of being stigmatized as people having “mental health issues.” Therefore, except for children, there is general reluctance to seek assistance for stress and social issues. Furthermore, MHPSS is also required for service providers.
- Due to the current COVID-19 context, it is difficult to organize capacity building and trainings.

### Recommended Action

- ⇒ Mapping of services available at local level.
- ⇒ More MHPSS activities (help the helper) and awareness raising on the need the for MHPSS support to care providers amongst care providers.



## Early Recovery Working Group

### Current Situation

Historically, Armenia has enjoyed a relatively stable economic growth with economic progress a large portion of low-skilled workers, low productive sectors, and labor migration. COVID-19 exposed the hidden economic weaknesses.<sup>5</sup> The impact of COVID-19 can be seen through a decline in travels, affecting tourism and business, although vaccinations have started (vaccines arrived on 28 March 2021).<sup>6</sup> Reports also show an inflationary increase in food prices to as high as 5.3% in February 2021, compared to 1.2% in 2020, with further inflation forecasted within 2021.<sup>7</sup>

At least 10% of over 7,200 respondents in the Socio-economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) reported losing jobs or reduced remuneration as companies and businesses took drastic action to address the growing shortage of cash, a situation likely to continue through 2021 through sudden spikes of COVID-19 infections.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of the shocks is faced by the most vulnerable sectors of the society due to limited availability of employment, continuing loss of jobs, and reduced operations of small businesses. Yerevan, the location with the largest population in the country, was reported to have been hit hardest by the pandemic, exacerbated by the influx of refugee-like population.

Restoration of social infrastructure services is an important support area of the Early Recovery Working Group (ERWG). In March, physical and social preparations such as site/beneficiary identification, technical readiness and preliminary groundwork for restoration of social infrastructure and services for host and refugee-like persons were conducted. Implementation is set to begin in April 2021 to support 230 individuals.

### Identified Priority Needs

Job creation, especially among the youth and women, which comprises the most extensive demographic proportion amongst the refugee-like population, is a priority.<sup>9</sup> Due to economic exigencies, provision of temporary jobs should continue to generate immediate income with an emphasis on hosting communities where the largest concentration of refugee-like populations resides and locations near LoC. The majority of the refugee-like persons are females; and partners’ cursory analysis that are corroborated by Migration Services data show women are likely to stay longer within Armenia<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Socio-economic Impact Assessment of the Covid-19 Outbreak in Armenian Communities, Armenia 2020, UNDP.

<sup>6</sup> The European Union and UN Armenia welcome the arrival of COVID -19 vaccines on 28 March 2021, <https://uni.cf/3fD6JhY>.

<sup>7</sup> Fitch Affirms Armenia at 'B+'; Outlook Stable, 26 March 2021, <https://bit.ly/3dwOmsp>.

<sup>8</sup> Socio-economic Impact Assessment of the Covid-19 Outbreak in Armenian Communities, Armenia 2020, UNDP.

<sup>9</sup> 59% of the population in a refugee-like situation is females and about 7.7% of population is between the age of 18 and 24. Source: Migration Services, March 2021.

<sup>10</sup> According to Migration Services data (March 2021), the majority of those who are unlikely to return to their place of former residence is comprised of females (56.4%). Moreover, proportion of working-age females unlikely to return (50%) is greater than proportion of working-age males that are unlikely to return (37%).

Increased utility bills and reduced income sources are a significant challenge to both the refugee-like and host populations. Energy-saving solutions to help reduce the cost of energy are an immediate priority.

Lack of accommodation facility predisposes the refugee-like population to private housing and temporary accommodation shelter that is unaffordable. Stop-gap measures such as the provision of immediate livelihoods can cushion the impact of crises and reduce vulnerabilities while long-term solutions to accommodation and shelter problems are developed.

### **Achievements and Impact**

- During March 2021, two ERWG partners, UNDP and UNIDO) reached 4,195 individuals through one or a combination of the following project activities: support to livelihoods and small business, restoration of social infrastructure and amenities, COVID-19 response, veteran support, social cohesion, peacebuilding and leadership development. Those reached individuals include members of hosting communities and refugee-like populations in 15 community locations in Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori, Shirak, Syunik, Tavush and Vayots Dzor marzes and Yerevan.
- The UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) project supporting economic activities and livelihoods in collective centers and host community were recently completed and its final evaluation was conducted in March. The evaluation of MPTF-funded project will support the design of new recovery projects and complement the result of upcoming Capacity Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to build an information baseline for better recovery planning and coordination.
- Community engagement, training, and mobilization of local leaders are central to the implementation of early recovery. Partners of social cohesion and peacebuilding trained 15 community leaders on community-led identification, prioritization and planning of social cohesion and peacebuilding action.
- A total of 64 individuals were assisted of their livelihood and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (out of 127) in Syunik, Yerevan, Tavush, Lori, and Shirak through business development and skills training, with plans to widen support to include market access in the coming month.

### **Remaining Gaps**

- There are capacity gaps in the delivery of basic services, which were noted by UNDP during preliminary gap analysis. The CVA, which is due to start in April, will highlight specific areas and details of critical capacity gaps of service provision.

### **Recommended Action**

- ⇒ There is a need to go beyond the current partners' activities, moving towards long-term development across all WGs. ERWG partners recommend aligning ERWG priorities with the ones of the government and to set sights beyond immediate recovery to long-term recovery. In this regard, UNDP has begun compiling and reviewing government priorities and plans that will be complemented by the results of CVA and other assessments. UNDP will also invite government representatives into ERWG meetings to familiarize with each other's activities and plans and to build stronger collaboration.

# WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

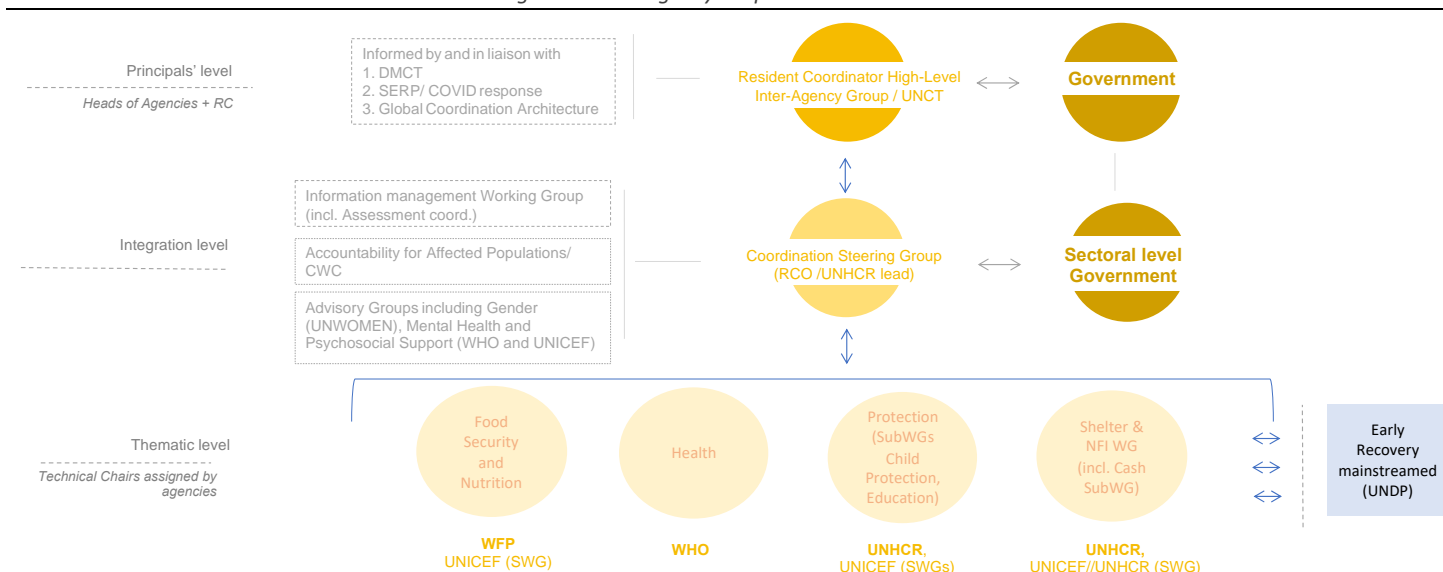
The UN team in Armenia established a coordination structure, which, at the technical level, is centered around four main humanitarian Working Groups (WG) – Shelter and NFIs, Protection, Food Security and Nutrition, and Health – as well as a fifth Working Group on Early Recovery allowing mainstreaming of longer-term initiatives to strengthen communities in Armenia. Additional Sub-Working Groups have been established for Child Protection, Education, and humanitarian cash transfer programming. These technical Working Groups form the backbone of the coordination of the humanitarian response and serve to mobilize and strengthen coordination and collaboration among the different UN agencies, international organizations, local and international NGOs with the ultimate goal to ensure provision of most efficient, swift and cost-effective humanitarian response to challenges generated by the conflict in NK. To date, 13 UN agencies, 22 international NGOs, 19 national NGOs, 2 intergovernmental organisations, 5 Government entities and 1 international organization are part of the coordination system.

Interagency coordination is ensured by the Coordination Steering Group (CSG), which is comprised of chairs of the activated WGs and co-lead by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and UNHCR. The CSG is supported by an Information Management WG to ensure a harmonized approach among agencies and partners in collecting information on activities and to facilitate data and information gathering as well as dissemination. A Technical Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support ensures a coordinated and effective approach on MHPSS activities across WGs.

At the Principals level, the coordination structure brings together the Resident Coordinator and Heads of UN Agencies to ensure overall alignment and clear guidance of the humanitarian response. The coordination model has been communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as to all relevant stakeholders.

Given the fluidity of the crisis, the coordination modalities are reviewed continuously and adjusted according to the evolving situation on the ground, in full respect of globally established mandated roles and responsibilities.

Figure 3: Inter-Agency Response Plan Structure



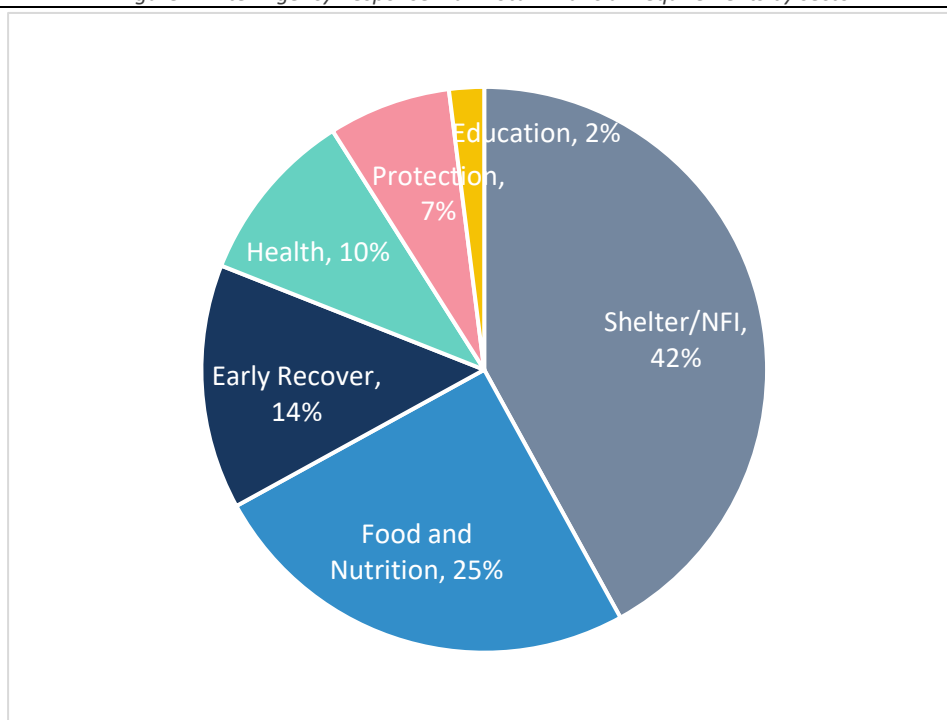
# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Under the leadership of UNHCR and the Resident Coordinator Office in Armenia, the Inter-Agency Response Plan 2020-2021 to address the broader humanitarian consequences of the NK crisis has been finalized, and launched at Yerevan level on 22 January (after its endorsement by the GoA on 20 January). This country-specific plan covers a period of nine months (from October 2020 until end of June 2021), and will serve as a coordination, advocacy and resource mobilization tool. It brings together 35 operational partners involved in the response (over 180 projects in total), **with total financial requirements amounting to USD 62,122,194** for the overall period. The Response Plan includes not only humanitarian activities (under Protection, Health, Food Security and Nutrition, and Shelter/NFIs) but also early recovery, resilience, and durable solutions components. The plan includes part of the host community, in addition to the displaced population from in and around NK in Armenia and also factors in documents such as the UN Strategic Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) that strategically governs development initiatives of the UN in Armenia from 2012 to 2025 as well as other Crisis Response Plans such as the “COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan”<sup>11</sup>, which is already in place.

The Coordination Team successfully applied for a Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) Rapid Response funding window. After extensive discussion with the CERF Secretariat, UNICEF, IOM, and UNHCR were awarded a total of **USD 2M** in mid-January to cover lifesaving needs in three sectors (Protection, including child protection and education, Health and Shelter/NFI). It is to be noted that the amount requested constitutes around 3.2% of the overall financial requirements identified for all sectors, which - as per the Inter-Agency Response Plan.

The current funding level for the Inter-Agency Response Plan 2020-2021 stands at **USD 8,794,260** which is equivalent to approximately **14 percent** of the requested amount. Contributions have been received from the governments of the USA and Japan, the European Union and CERF.

Figure 4: Inter-Agency Response Plan Total Financial Requirements by sector



#### Contacts:

Denise Sumpf, UN RCO, Head of Resident Coordinator Office, [sumpf@un.org](mailto:sumpf@un.org), Tel: + 374 4432 1140

Frederic Cussigh, UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator, [cussigh@unhcr.org](mailto:cussigh@unhcr.org), Tel: +374 55 416423

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.un.am/up/file/SERRP.pdf>