

PROTECTION MONITORING ARMENIA

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2021

REPORT #2



OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

On 27 September 2020, fighting broke out along the former line of contact between Armenia and Azerbaijan and progressively expanded until a ceasefire statement was signed on 9 November 2020. As a consequence, tens of thousands of people affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict fled to Armenia while tens of thousands of conflict-affected people were also temporarily displaced within Azerbaijan.

According to the Armenian Migration Service, some 90,000 persons found themselves in a refugee-like situation in Armenia as reported in December 2020 and who at the time were residing in ten marzes (provinces) of the country¹ including in the capital. Of these, 88% were women and children.² According to the population data from the Migration Service of Armenia, 68,050 persons (75%) in a refugee-like situation have remained in Armenia as of 21 February 2021. The number of individuals who have returned is calculated based on their registration in the return areas for the cash or other type of humanitarian assistance. Among the refugee-like population who remained in Armenia, the gender distribution was 59% female (40,127 individuals) and 41% male (27,923 individuals).³ Still, there is no clarity as to how many of these returns are permanent or of a more temporary nature.

The host community in Armenia welcomed the refugee-like population, sharing accommodation, food, and other available resources. However, previously socioeconomically stable households that hosted refugee-like families are now facing challenges to pay rent, utilities and provide food. In addition to being hosted by local communities, the new arrivals benefit from the communal accommodation provided by the Government. In its effort to address urgent needs of the affected population, the Government has been rolling out several cash-based support programmes, since mid-November 2020, for the affected population.

METHODOLOGY⁴

Protection monitoring is defined as a systematic and regular collection, verification, and analysis of information over an extended period to identify violations of rights and/or protection risks/priorities/needs for populations of concern. The results of monitoring can be used to achieve coherent and evidence-based community focused response and advocacy.

Protection monitoring in Armenia is conducted by UNHCR through different data collection tools, including individual/household interviews and key informant interviews as well as observations. It also accounts for information and needs coming from other communication points including self-referral through the UNHCR-operated hotline, among others. The principles of Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) are applied in the design of the Protection monitoring methodology to ensure the exercise duly informs the delivery of specialized protection response focused on an individual's needs, capacities, opportunities, and vulnerabilities. The Protection monitoring questionnaire included individual, as well as household-level questions. For community-

¹ Aragaatsotn, Ararat, Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori, Shirak, Syunik, Tavush, and Vayots Dzor.

² REACH Rapid Needs Assessment of Displaced Population from Nagorno-Karabakh, 10-20 October 2020 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/83324>

³ Government data on persons from NK in a refugee-like situation in Armenia, available at : <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/>

⁴ Protection monitoring sits in the centre of the protection information and data ecosystem, with linkages to other information systems to achieve an effective response. Protection monitoring is shaped by UNHCR's points of communications with persons of concern (PoCs), regardless of the medium and UNHCR presence within the community

based responses some findings can be validated through technical assessments or focus group discussions to support the implementation of the community-based projects aimed at strengthening of community mobilization and promotion of peaceful coexistence. The analysis contained in this report is mostly based on individual/household interviews and key informant interviews conducted throughout January-February 2021.

UNHCR's Protection monitoring exercise started on 19 November 2020 and is conducted through household/individual interviews using a questionnaire survey with the refugee-like population to gain an overview of their protection situation, needs, and coping mechanisms. In addition, during January-February, key informant interviews and observations were conducted in collective/transitional shelters with settlements' authorities, social workers, humanitarian workers, and community leaders. Departure monitoring in Yerevan was conducted through short interviews with the returning population

PROTECTION MONITORING IN ARMENIA

Highlights

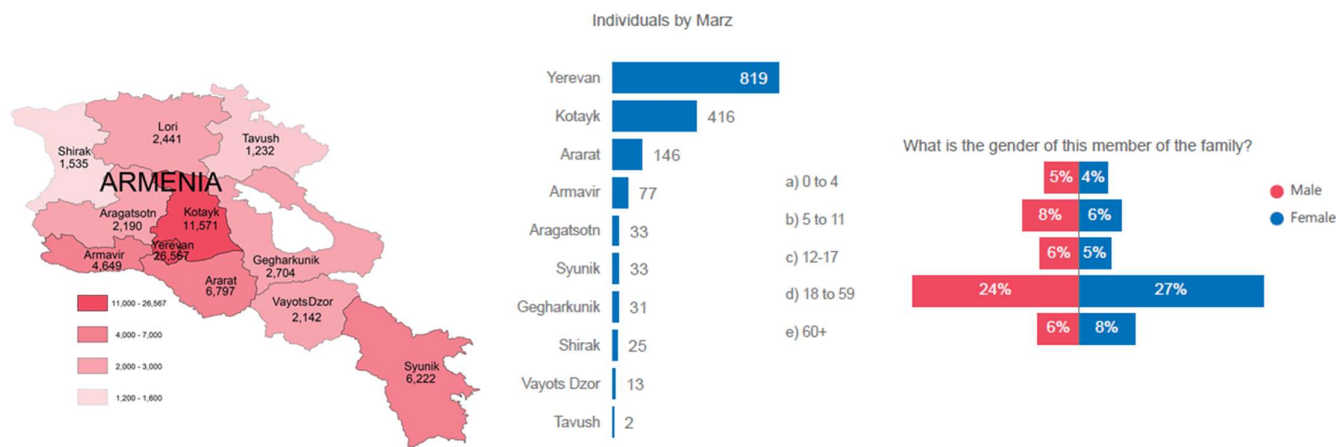
- 1,595 individuals were interviewed, of whom 51% were female and 49% male;
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of the children represented by the sample were registered and attending a school or a kindergarten. 85% of the out of school children were aged 3-5, while percentage of children out of school aged 6-17 was 8%;
- Main priority needs expressed: shelter, cash, household items, access to food, access to employment, and clothing items. In comparison to the previous reporting period, when 39% of households relied on humanitarian assistance to cover their expenses as the main source of income, during the period of January-February 2021, only 27% of interviewed households indicated humanitarian assistance as one of the main sources of income;
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of interviewed individuals reported that they or someone else in their family were showing signs of stress, and 54% of respondents have noticed signs of stress in their children, including changes in their routine behaviour. In comparison with the previous Protection monitoring exercise, the number of adults suffering from stress has decreased by 12%. However, the number of children in stressed condition did not decline;
- 33% of pregnant women in a refugee-like situation reported to have not received the required assistance during their pregnancy.

During the reporting period UNHCR conducted 327 Protection monitoring interviews with people in a refugee-like situation displaced to Armenia after 27 September 2020. The questionnaire used included questions related to the situation of individuals interviewed as well as their family members (totalling more than 1,595 individuals). The average number of individuals per family is 4.8.

Demographics

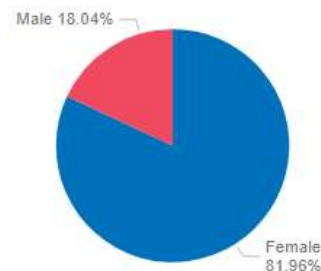
Over half, 51% of those covered by the Protection monitoring are adults between 18 and 59 years of age, 34% are children (under 10 years old) and 14% are over 60 years old. There was a noticeable change in the demographics as more families have reunited or departed. In January – February 2021 the interviews were conducted mostly in the city of Yerevan and provinces of Kotayk, Ararat and Armavir, since the majority of

people in a refugee-like situation were residing in those regions as of mid-February. The places of current residence of persons in a refugee-like situation is reflected in the map represented by the number of persons in the provinces of Armenia and city of Yerevan, while the distribution of the population – whose situation was monitored – is reflected in the graph below.



Among those interviewed, 47% of the monitored population confirmed that they have secondary education, 27% tertiary or University education, 17% postgraduate, and 9% other. Respondents were asked about their previous occupation, and 25% of the interviewed informed that they used to work in education/health system, 18% used to be formally employed, 15% were busy with housekeeping/childcare, and 9% were unemployed.

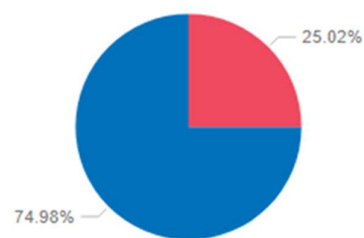
Gender of the person interviewed



Vulnerabilities and Specific Needs

A quarter (25%) of individuals are persons with specific needs, including persons with disability, single females, persons with serious medical conditions⁵ without access to treatment, elderly at risk⁶, pregnant or lactating women, unaccompanied or separated children⁷, and children in extended families⁸ or children spouses⁹.

Individuals with SP needs



Twenty-four percent (24%) of monitored individuals in the age 60 and above category are at risk, including those elderly who have extensive medical needs (91%), elderly lacking family or community support (5%), and elderly with psychosocial needs (4%).

Ninety-nine percent of the families interviewed mentioned that there were no unaccompanied or separated children residing with or known to them, while 24% reported to have a child in an extended family or a child

⁵ Serious medical condition, a condition that requires assistance, in terms of treatment or provision of nutritional and non-food items, in the country of asylum. It includes: mental illness, malnutrition, difficult pregnancy, chronic illness, critical medical condition, other medical condition, addiction.

⁶ Elderly at risk, a person of 60 years old or above, with specific need(s) in addition to his/her age. This includes single older persons and older couples. They may be the sole caregivers for others, suffer from health problems, and have difficulty adjusting to their new environment, and/or otherwise lack psychological, physical, economic, social or other support from family members or others.

⁷ Unaccompanied or separated child, a person below the age of 18 who is currently not under the care of either parent or other legal or customary primary caregiver.

⁸ Extended family, a family which extends beyond the nuclear family to include grandparents and other relatives.

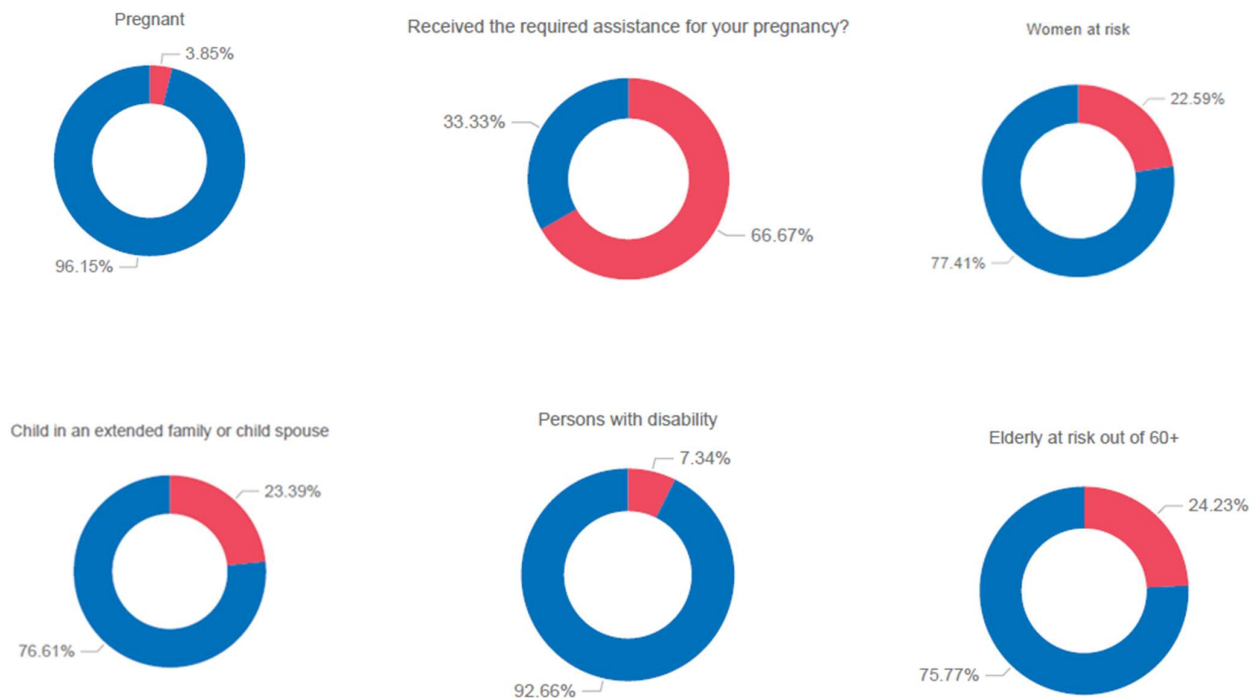
⁹ Child spouse, a person below the age of 18 who is married.

spouse in the household. In most of the cases (67%) the child in the extended family was reported to be the grandchild of the interviewed individual.

Seven percent (7%) of the interviewed population reported to have different types of disabilities, mostly related to physical ones; 4% of the interviewed women in a refugee-like (age 13-55) population are pregnant, and 33% of them reportedly have not received the required assistance for pregnancy.

The number of the women at risk¹⁰ has slightly increased during the period of January-February 2021 compared to November - December 2020. While during the Protection monitoring exercise in November-December 22% of the interviewed females were reported to be at risk, during January-February their number increased to 22.5%.

The Protection monitoring exercise revealed that the number of the individuals with serious medical condition increased from 16% in November – December 2020 to 26% in January – February 2021.



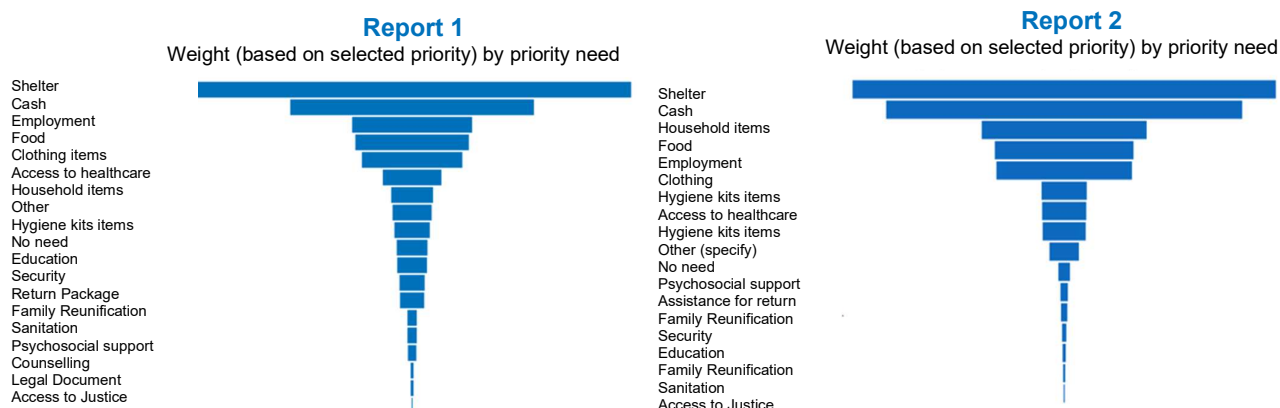
Priority Needs

The priority needs as expressed by persons interviewed are **shelter, cash, household items, access to food, access to employment and clothing items**. When compared with the results of the previous reporting period, UNHCR observed that shelter and cash remain as the most relevant priorities for the population in a

¹⁰ Woman of 18 years or above who is at risk because of her gender, such as single mothers or caregivers, single women, widows, older women, women with disabilities and survivors of violence

refugee-like situation, while household items become the third priority and replaced employment (please refer to the graph).

*“We constantly have to prioritise and choose between buying clothes or school items for our children, and it’s becoming more and more difficult to make the right decision...”
~ a father of three schoolchildren living in a rented apartment in Goris*



Documentation

During the Protection monitoring conducted in the period of November-December 2020, respondents did not report serious problems regarding documentation. Most of the population interviewed had documents: 98% of population interviewed mentioned that they had brought passports, 64% birth certificates, 23% marriage certificates, and 15% property ownership documents.

Based on the analysis of the findings of the first Protection monitoring report,¹¹ the Protection monitoring team decided to explore more deeply the issue of documentation in January-February, and additional questions were put regarding the availability of documents at the individual level. The majority, 65% of interviewed individuals mentioned that they had passports with them, 28% did not have any identification documents and 6% had valid ID cards. Nearly 100% reported having a birth certificate.

In 32% of cases, the interviewed individuals mentioned that they had civil status documents in their possession, 24% were missing property ownership documents, 12% (their own) birth certificates, and 10% school diplomas. The rest reported missing other civil status documents, such as: marriage certificate (9%), driving licence (3%), residency card (1%), death certificate (1%), and other/not specified (6%). Of the interviewed population who did not have documentation, 35% mentioned that they did not approach authorities for missing documents due to the following reasons: lack of information about the location where to obtain the documents (35%), lack of resources to cover expenses (22%), lack of relevant authority in the location (16%), and not being eligible to obtain the document (4%).

Movement within Armenia and return intentions.

¹¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86256>

There was an increase in the number of people in a refugee-like situation who had to move from their first accommodation in Armenia since their first displacement. During November-December some 35% of interviewees had moved away from their first accommodation. During January-February 2021, 62% of respondents mentioned that they had moved several times (including changing different types of accommodations). Over half, 57% of interviewed population mentioned that they have stayed in their current accommodation for 3 months or more. Three main reasons for moving from previous accommodation were reported as following: lack of alternative accommodation (54%), overcrowded commonly shared premises (16%) and reportedly requested by authorities (7%).

"We are kept in limbo, we have nowhere to go... It's nice in Sisian, but how longer can we stay here? Very soon, we may not be able to pay for the rent..."

~ a large family of children and women living in a small apartment in Sisian

During the first Protection monitoring report exercise the assessed families were almost equally divided on their intentions to return: 35% were willing to return, 35% were not willing to return and some 30% did not know. Families willing to return mentioned that they were planning to travel in the very near future: within the next few days (the majority) or within the coming month.

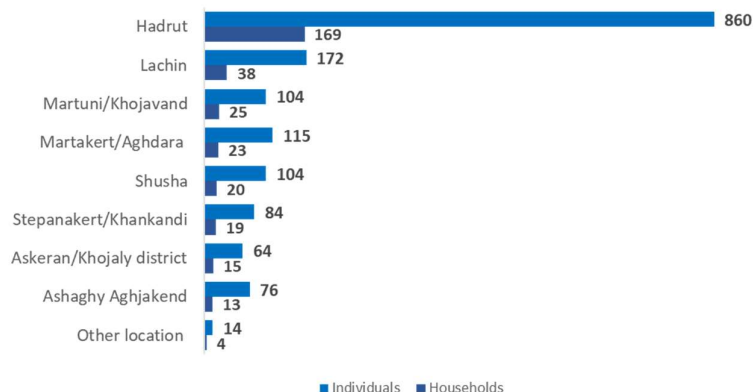
During the second Protection monitoring report exercise 30% of interviewed households wanted to return, 35% did not know, 29% were planning to relocate within Armenia, and 6% wanted to go to a third country.



Perceived risks upon return: Among the risks upon return the following ones were reported: security risks (26%) no access to the area of origin/former habitual residence (23%), lack of access to livelihood (18%), and damaged property (17%).

Place of former habitual residence prior to the displacement to Armenia, as stated by the people interviewed: Most of the interviewed people came from Stepanakert/Khankandi, Hadrut and Martakert/Aghdara during the November-December 2020 Protection monitoring exercise, while during January-February 2021 Protection monitoring exercise most of the interviewed households were from Hadrut, Lachin and Martakert/Aghdara, and there were less interviewees from Stepanakert/Khankandi. This trend could indicate that many people from Stepanakert/Khankandi may have already returned by January-February 2021.

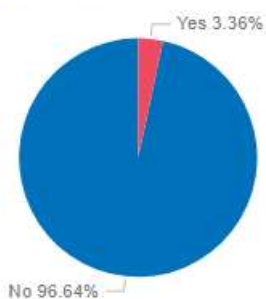
Place of habitual residence in NK (as stated by people interviewed)



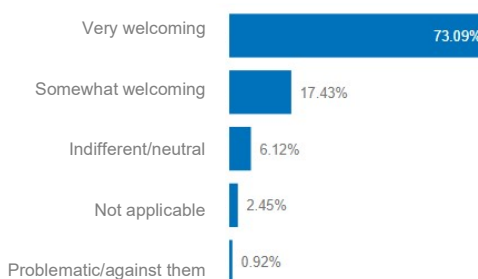
Protection Concerns

Social Cohesion Concerns: Ninety-two percent (92%) of interviewed households felt safe in their current location in Armenia. Persons were also asked to report any incidents related to social cohesion. 97% of households mentioned that they did not have any incidents with host communities, and 73% mentioned that the host communities were very welcoming, which indicates a 15% decrease in comparison with the previous reporting period.

Incidents with the host community



How welcoming is the host community?



Protection Incidents: In total 28 protection incidents were reported, of which 7 were related to missing a family member or abduction of a family member, that happened prior to the displacement to Armenia. Most prevalent incidents were physical violence and a family member being missing.

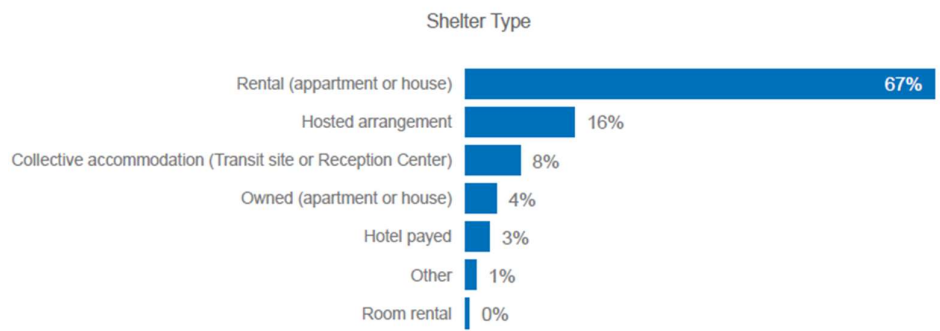
“Sevan town is ‘famous’ for its harsh winters. If not your assistance, especially the winter clothes and the electric heater we’ve timely received, it would have been extremely difficult to endure the icy wind coming from Lake Sevan”.

~a family with many children hosted in Sevan town, Gegharkunik region

Living Conditions: In

comparison to the previous reporting period, when 81% of assessed persons were not paying any rent although they could have been living in a privately owned accommodation, during January-February 2021, 67% of the interviewed population

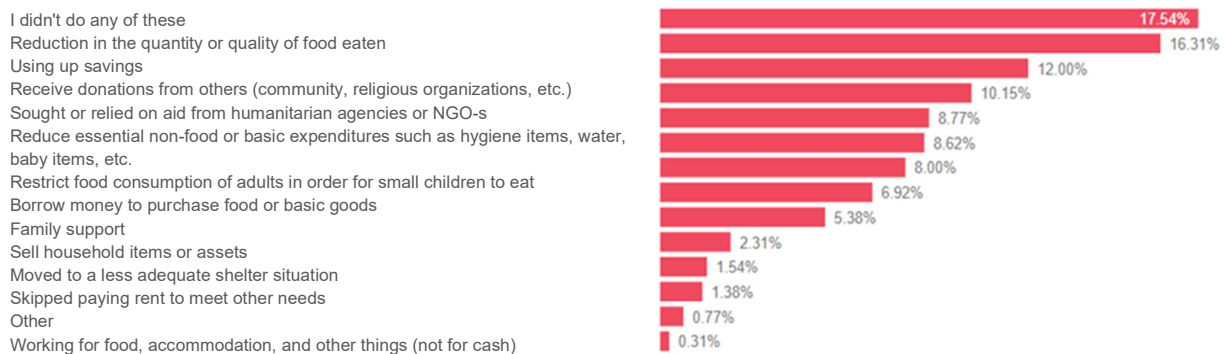
were living in rental apartments or houses, and 57% of them were paying rent. Only 5% of the interviewed households reported that they receive cash assistance for rent. There was also a decrease in the percentage of the persons living in collective shelters (16% in November-December and 8% in January-February).



Of the interviewees, 99% confirmed having access to electricity, 95% to water inside their dwellings, 76% to private toilets. 51% of the individuals confirmed that they are planning to stay in current accommodation, 27% did not know and 22% were going to leave their current accommodation. It is worth stressing that access to services (electricity, gas, water, etc.) is not for free and affected populations continue to need financial support to afford these.

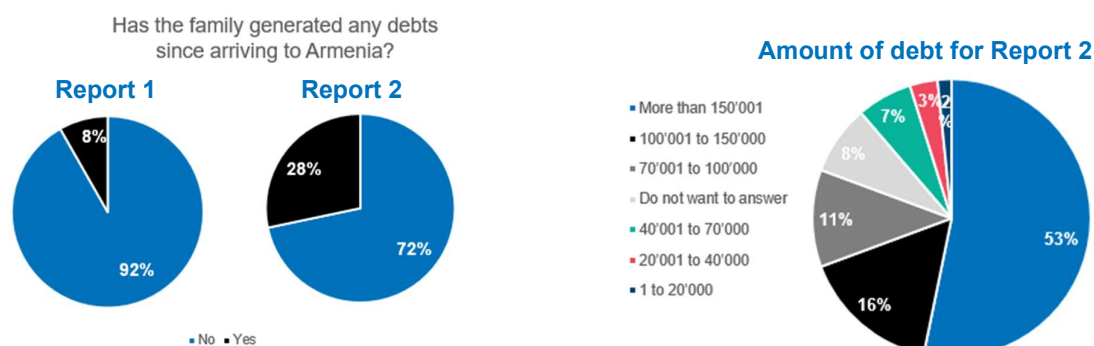
Coping mechanisms and livelihood: Coping mechanisms related to displacement include reduction of the quantity or quality of food, spending savings, receiving donations from community, faith-based organizations, etc., seeking or relying on aid from humanitarian agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), portioning food consumption of adults, borrowing money, and relying on family support. Sixteen percent of those interviewed said they had reduced the quantity or quality of food, 12% were spending previously owned savings, 10% were receiving donations from community, religious organizations, etc., 9% sought or relied on aid from humanitarian agencies or NGO-s, another 9% had to restrict food consumption of adults for small children to eat, 7% had to borrow money to purchase food or basic goods, and 5% relied on family support. A few risky coping mechanisms identified by UNHCR included sending children to work and sending children to other families.

Coping mechanisms



The findings of the second reporting period revealed that there was a sharp increase of debts among the interviewed population in a refugee-like situation. In comparison with the first reporting period, when 7% of

the households interviewed confirmed having generated debt since arriving in Armenia, in January-February 2021, 28% of households confirmed that they generated debts since their arrival in Armenia, and the amount of debt in 53% of such cases was more than 150,000 DRM.



Access to Services

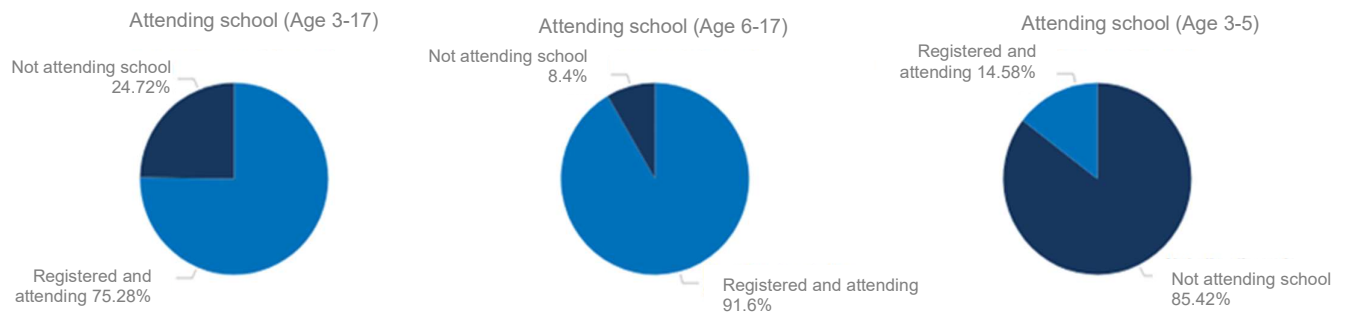
Access to healthcare: Forty-seven percent (47%) of the persons interviewed said they or their family member had some health-related issues since their arrival to Armenia (e.g., physical, or mental health, suffered an accident, or chronic illness). Out of those, 75% applied to a health facility, and 94% received some sort of medical assistance. During the previous period of Protection monitoring (November – December 2020), the assistance was provided in 62% of cases. Some of the obstacles on accessing medical assistance mentioned by respondents include lack of resources to cover expenses, lack of information on where to access services, and distance from the nearest health facility.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, 98% of the interviewed households mentioned that they were well-informed of the preventive measures and 96% confirmed that they had access to different protective equipment.

Access to psychosocial support: Seventy-three percent (73%) of interviewed individuals reported that they or someone else in their family were showing signs of stress, and 54% of respondents have noticed signs of stress in their children including changes in their routine behaviour. Lost livelihood (18%), loss of property (17%), ongoing conflict (16%), lack of shelter (11%), loss of hope for the future (10%), not being able to return home (9%) and being separated from their community (9%) were reported as the main sources of stress by the interviewed households. However, only 29% of interviewed households have sought psychosocial support. This is similar to the findings of the first Protection monitoring report reflecting that 83% of the interviewees reported that they had not sought psychosocial support.

Access to education: Three quarters (75%) of the children represented by the sample were registered and attending a school or a kindergarten. Specifically, 85% of the children aged 3-5, during the reported period, were not attending kindergarten, while 92% of the children, aged 6-17 represented by the sample were registered and attending schools.

Children represented by the sample were reportedly not attending kindergartens/schools due to facts such as the uncertainty about the duration of stay in Armenia, no school/kindergartens in neighbourhood, fees, supplies, transportation costs, closure of the school/kindergarten due to COVID-19 situation, limited space in local schools/kindergartens, and others, as reflected in the graphs below.



Access to food: Seventy-six percent (76%) of interviewed households reported that their household has access to 3 meals a day, 34% have access to 1 or 2 meals a day and 20% to 2 meals a day. Vast majority, 82% of the interviewed households mentioned that they needed food assistance and 95% of interviewed households reported that they had received food assistance after displacement. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of households received the food assistance the previous month, 30% several days before, 16% in the month the interview was conducted, and 13% several months before.

Key Informant Interviews: UNHCR Protection monitoring team conducted key informant interviews to get more insight into the situation of the conflict-affected population after 27 September 2020. Among the key informants were community volunteers, humanitarian workers, representatives of the local authorities, and the site management. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the interviewed key informants rated the accessibility of “Shelter” in their community/collective shelter as bad or insufficient and only 24% as good or sufficient. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the interviewed key informants reported that in their community/collective shelter the accessibility of health services is sufficient, and there are hospitals/clinics in a walking distance, while 32% mentioned that the accessibility of health services is either bad or insufficient and there are no hospitals/clinics in a walking distance. The accessibility of education was rated as good by 66% of the interviewees, sufficient by 29% and insufficient by the rest. Also, 95% of the interviewed key informants mentioned that there are schools in walking distance, while kindergartens in walking distance were mentioned by 80% of interviewed key informants. The three priority needs mentioned by the key informants were: **housing, livelihood, and financial support**. Supporting the effort of population estimation in the absence of de-registration and updating of registration records in Armenia, based on the departures monitoring data and key informant interviews with local authorities/social workers/community leaders, it could be estimated that close to 45,000 to 50,000 persons in a refugee-like situation remained in Armenia as of February 2021.

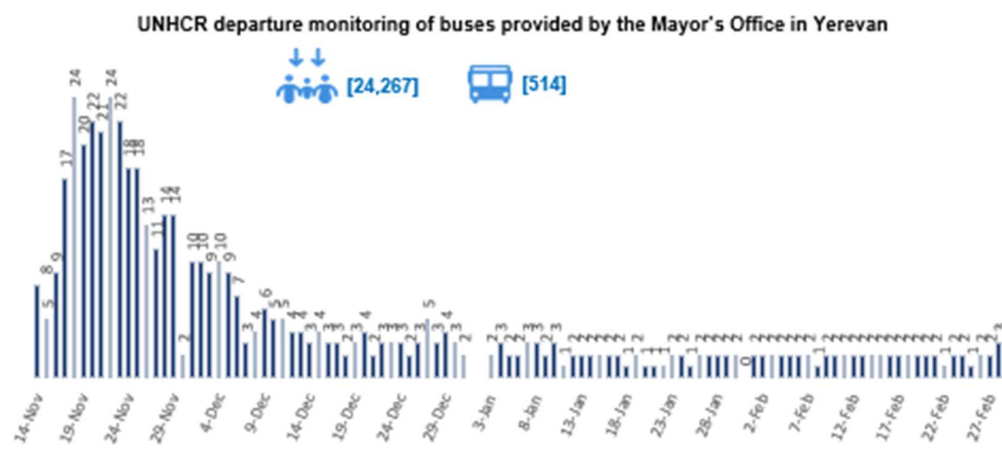
DEPARTURES MONITORING

Highlights

- As in the previous reporting period, buses were provided by the Yerevan Municipality through a private company;
- More than 50% of returnees were women, children, and older persons;

- The parking lot was almost never overcrowded, and all the returnees were able to board the buses. The drivers mentioned that there was a practice of picking up individuals on the way return areas;
- Many of the returnees mentioned that they were departing for Stepanakert/Khankandi. Even when the returnees did not have a property in Stepanakert/Khankandi, they were planning to rent there;
- Low level of income, lack of employment opportunities, and poor housing/living conditions in Armenia were mentioned as the main causes for return;
- As in the previous reporting period, UNHCR team observed that there is no pre-departure registration for departures;
- No priority boarding for older persons or persons with small children was observed by UNHCR; and there was no Police or ambulance present;
- UNHCR was distributing COVID-19 leaflets in the buses for the returnees.

UNHCR Armenia had been monitoring departures of buses from Yerevan to Stepanakert/Khankandi, organized by the Yerevan Municipality starting from 14 November 2020. Through the reporting period, initially there were several departure points (Yerevan Municipality, Shahumyan square, and “Kilikia” bus station) but since 16 November 2020, departures have been taking place only from “Kilikia” bus station. The monitoring, which is conducted by UNHCR staff, is focused on the organization of departures, observation of the profile of returnees and their possible specific needs, use of COVID-19 preventive measures, and collection of individual information through random interviews at the place of departure.



During the monitoring period there was a sharp decrease in the number of people departing Armenia. In January-February 2021, UNHCR Protection team observed a daily average of 82 people, while during November-December 2020, the daily average of departing individuals was 404.

In addition, during the reporting period UNHCR Protection monitoring team conducted structured interviews with some individuals departing from the “Kilikia” bus station. The findings of interviews showed that only for 2% of the interviewed individuals the return after 27 September 2020 was for the first time. For 70% of interviewees, it was the second time, while the rest (28%) moved for more than 2 times. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the interviewed individuals mentioned that they were going to stay in return areas, 26% did not know, and 20% were not planning to stay there. In addition, the interviewees were asked a question on their accommodation in Armenia, and only 5% mentioned that they were staying in collective shelters in Armenia.



A UNHCR colleague interviewing a displaced woman in refugee-like situation from Nagorno-Karabakh hosted in a collective shelter in Dilijan, Tavush province of Armenia.
Photo by UNHCR



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