



WOMEN'S
FUND
ARMENIA

REPORT ON HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT TO DISPLACED FAMILIES FROM ARTSAKH

Background

Women's Fund Armenia is an organization that supports various projects aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality in Armenia. Through partnership with various NGOs Women's Fund Armenia advocates for development of the feminist movement in Armenia.

Established in 2018, it has implemented dozens of projects empowering local feminist organizations and responding to the evolving needs of the communities, as well as covering the humanitarian support projects while the emerged crises.

In September 2023, the usual course of the projects implemented by the NGOs was disturbed by the rapid displacement of over 100,000 people from Artsakh to Armenia within 48 hours. This event created a significant humanitarian crisis that required immediate and coordinated response from various organizations, including NGOs partnering with Women's Fund Armenia. WFA's role in managing this situation was crucial in providing support to the displaced people from Artsakh during the crisis. Thanks to the rapid funding opportunities provided by the WFA, the local NGOs were able to meet the urgent needs of the displaced people relocated in mostly all regions of Armenia.

Rationale for Evaluation

The massive influx of displaced people resulted in urgent needs that required assessment and response. Based on the rapid assessments, various humanitarian aid projects were implemented in a very short period of time. The projects implemented in emergency situations are always very rapid, spontaneous and hard to supervise. Therefore, evaluating the support provided by the humanitarian aid projects allows for understanding how effectively the needs of the displaced individuals were met and what can be done differently if such situations repeat.

Method: To evaluate the results, a one-time session of a focus group discussion involving 10 representatives from the partnering NGOs was conducted. This discussion aimed to gather qualitative data and insights from the ground to understand the situation better. It allowed to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the aid provided by partnering NGOs during the crisis. This includes understanding the impact on the refugees' well-being, the challenges faced, and the outcomes achieved. The focus group discussion provided an opportunity for NGO representatives to share the challenges they faced in implementing aid projects during the crisis, which will inform future planning and response strategies.

Objectives of the Evaluation: The evaluation aimed to outline the challenges faced by the NGOs, the impact on their ongoing projects and staff well-being, lessons learned, and current needs for long-term support of the refugees.

- The crisis had the potential to disrupt ongoing projects and negatively impact the well-being of NGO staff. The evaluation aimed to assess these aspects to better understand the broader impact of the crisis on the NGOs' operations.
- On the other hand, the discussions of the lessons learnt et light on the insights into how to improve future humanitarian aid efforts, including enhancing preparedness and response strategies.
- The last but not least, understanding the current needs of the NGOs and displaced people for long-term support is crucial for planning sustainable aid and recovery initiatives. The evaluation helped to identify gaps and opportunities for ongoing support.

Through this evaluation, Women's Fund Armenia gained valuable insights into the effectiveness of the aid projects and how to better support the partnering NGOs in addressing the needs of the displaced people from Artsakh.

Evaluation Findings

Mobilization of Resources When in an Emerged Crisis

Mobilizing resources effectively during an emerging crisis is essential to provide **timely and impactful support** to those affected. The process begins with a rapid needs assessment to understand the scope of the crisis and the immediate requirements of affected individuals. This initial assessment is critical for prioritizing resource allocation and ensuring the response aligns with the most urgent needs.

As reported by the participants of the discussion, given the urgent situation with forced deportations, NGOs had to quickly mobilize all their resources to support displaced families. Many NGOs had previous experience providing humanitarian support in 2020 when people were temporarily resettled throughout Armenia during the war. This time, the NGOs swiftly cooperated with the state to offer support. Some NGOs were directly contacted by families who had been their beneficiaries in 2020, while others conducted needs assessments in the region to identify the primary needs of families and their relocation destinations.

Once the immediate needs are identified, clear and achievable objectives for the crisis response must be established. These objectives guide the resource mobilization effort and ensure a focused approach to providing aid. Activation of existing networks, including partnerships with other organizations, government agencies, and stakeholders, is vital to pool resources and expertise effectively. Streamlined communication is another key aspect of resource mobilization. **Establishing efficient channels for coordinating** with partners, volunteers, and the community ensures that resources are directed to where they are most needed. Leveraging technology for data collection, coordination, and communication can enhance efficiency and help track resource allocation and impact. **Flexibility in funding** and **resource allocation** is essential to adapt to changing needs and circumstances during a crisis. This may involve reallocating budgets or seeking additional funding sources as the situation evolves. Engaging local communities and involving local leaders and community members in the response effort provides valuable insights and helps tailor support to the specific cultural and social context. A diverse range of funding sources, including government grants, private donations, corporate sponsorships, and international aid, can provide the financial support needed for effective crisis management. Maintaining transparency in how resources are used and the impact of contributions builds trust with donors and stakeholders and encourages ongoing support.

The partners highlighted the importance of the Fund's grants provided ad-hoc for the urgent needs of displaced families, which proved to be crucial as requests for support increased by the hour. At the onset of the deportation period, all projects focused on providing immediate humanitarian aid in the form of food, hygiene items, clothing, bedding, medicine, Christmas presents for children and other essentials. All partners noted the flexibility of the Fund in provision of funds for urgent projects with no limitation in the activities.

Some NGOs purchased these items themselves and distributed them to families, while others provided vouchers, allowing families to purchase what they needed. Partners who adopted the voucher approach found it more effective as it enabled families to select items according to their specific needs rather than being limited to standard packages. Regardless of the approach, the outcome was similar: families were able to meet their basic needs. This short-term support lasted for approximately 3-4 months from the start of the deportation period. Subsequently, each NGO designed mid-term and long-term support projects to assist refugee families in their respective communities and regions.

Among the mid-term and long-term projects implemented with the Fund's support, the followings can be outlined:

- **Psychological Support:** Programs offering therapy and resilience-building activities for displaced families.
- **Vocational Education:** Fostered employment opportunities for displaced women and girls through vocational training and education.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Initiatives aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of Artsakh.
- **Community Integration:** Projects promoting long-term integration between displaced and local community members for peaceful coexistence.
- **Therapeutic Support Groups:** Various peer-to-peer groups such as positive parenting, self-care, yoga, and other wellness activities.
- **Disability Support:** Specialized support and resources for displaced individuals with disabilities.
- **Reproductive Healthcare:** Healthcare support specifically tailored to women of reproductive age.

Documenting lessons learned during the crisis response is valuable for improving future resource mobilization efforts and crisis management plans. Strengthening community resilience through investments in infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives can help communities better prepare for and respond to future crises. Partners in Goris were on the frontline of the support provision and were also documenting the deportation stories and witnessing for the history.

Throughout the crisis response, prioritizing the safety and well-being of staff, volunteers, and affected individuals is crucial. Providing **training and resources for mental health and stress management** supports those involved in the effort. Continuous monitoring and evaluation help assess the effectiveness of the crisis response and identify areas for improvement.

Thus, with previous experience from 2020, and through their swift and dedicated response, local NGOs successfully provided critical support to displaced families during a time of urgent need. By addressing both immediate and longer-term needs, they were able to assist families in stabilizing their situations and rebuilding their lives. Their flexible approaches, including the use of vouchers and tailored support, ensured that displaced families received the assistance most relevant to their circumstances. As a result, the NGOs' efforts not only met essential humanitarian needs but also laid the groundwork for the successful integration of displaced individuals and families into local communities.

Impact of the Emerging Crisis Situation on Ongoing Projects and Staff Members

The partners presented the challenges they faced as a result of the situation caused by the forced deportation of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh. Several important aspects were significantly influenced by the emerging crisis, resulting in both negative and positive outcomes.

Negative Outcomes

Emotional, Psychological, and Professional Burnout: The crisis placed significant emotional and psychological burdens on staff and team members. Many began to identify with the displaced people, reliving the horrors of the deportation, 48-hour evacuation, and 9-month blockade preceding the deportation.

"I had a similar experience of working with refugees in Canada. There, I can set boundaries, and although you remain calm underneath, working with foreigners in the camp, and others fosters a greater sense of camaraderie. However, being closely identified with your homeland creates an entirely different situation. One of the biggest challenges our entire team faced was psychological—a deep-seated fear was established."

Partner from Yerevan

Recognizing the risks of professional burnout, the Fund allocated 10% of its budget for partners' healing activities. Initially, some partners preferred to allocate the entire budget for humanitarian support activities. However, midway through, they realized the importance of self-care and healing activities.

"It is commendable that the organization, the Fund, is beginning to address these issues, and we are also starting to raise these concerns, listen, and engage. If we continue at this pace, we may find ourselves unable to function one day. Some team members have simply refused to work with displaced women, feeling unable to overcome the emotional burden."

Partner from Yerevan

NGOs that used to operate in Nagorno Karabakh and were forcibly displaced faced double the emotional crisis. Nevertheless, many organizations engaged in self-care activities such as Thai spa sessions, psychological counseling, and peer-to-peer support groups.

"One of the ways we overcame challenges was by regularly engaging in team building with our team. We often discussed the situation and supported each other, which helped us to stay strong during difficult times. We knew we couldn't afford to be weak at that moment because many people needed our support. This sense of solidarity enabled us to remain strong and fully support our compatriots until the end."

Partner from Gyumri

Adaptation and Flexibility: Partners had to adapt and be flexible in response to the crisis. They quickly reformulated budgets and redirected resources toward humanitarian aid, shifting focus from existing programs.

"At the onset of the deportation we were working to raise funds so that we could quickly receive more support from other ongoing programs. We tried to adjust the budgets and, through negotiations with donors, allocate a portion of the budget from active programs to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Artsakh".

Partner from Gyumri

"In fact, in terms of the projects, it's not by chance that we have a force majeure clause in the Agreements. Naturally, all the projects deviated from their deadlines during that time, straying from the timelines, which was completely normal. I think it was acceptable for the donors, and we tried to cooperate with existing donor and, where possible, incorporate supportive elements to address the humanitarian crisis we were facing at that moment."

Partner from Hrazdan

Most projects were put on hold with donor permission, but not all donors allowed long-term halts. Despite these challenges, partners adapted to meet the changing needs of beneficiaries.

Positive Outcomes

Learning and Growth: Partners gained valuable insights into their strengths and weaknesses, informing future plans and strategies. Based on challenges faced and lessons learned, they identified points for future improvement.

Importance of Self-Care: Partners recognized the necessity of self-care for team well-being and sustainability of their work. They emphasized the need for psychological support and training to manage emotional and psychological stress.

"In any case, self-care is crucial. While support is important, we've also prioritized self-care and have progressed as a team. The positive words and outcomes we've seen in our work have inspired us and kept us going. However, we must acknowledge the need for complete, relaxing self-care, which is often overlooked. In my opinion, the best self-care for our team is seeing the results of our work, knowing we've overcome challenges and are still standing, and having the opportunity to correct our mistakes and improve".

Partner from Vayots Dzor

Adapting to New Requirements: NGOs previously operating in Nagorno Karabakh, alongside all the nightmare they went through and all the deprivations they had faced, reportedly experienced some opportunities from the emerged situation, such as increased donor interest. However, they faced challenges in preparing applications, communicating with donors, and implementing projects in new societal contexts with different requirements.

The impact of the crisis on ongoing projects and staff members highlighted both the immense challenges and valuable opportunities for learning and growth. As partners navigated emotional and psychological strain, they adapted and demonstrated resilience in their approach. The allocation of funds towards self-care activities and the recognition of its importance for sustaining their work showed a shift in prioritization that could influence future crisis management strategies. The partners' experience in adjusting budgets and focusing on humanitarian aid showcases their ability to remain flexible and effective in the face of adversity. Ultimately, the crisis underscored the significance of adaptability and self-care while reaffirming the strength and dedication of the organizations and their staff in overcoming obstacles and continuing to support those in need.

Gender Differences of the Deportation Consequences

Forcible deportation can have distinct consequences based on gender due to differences in social roles, vulnerabilities, and responsibilities. According to the literature among such differences the following s can be grouped and viewed from gender dimensions:

- **Safety and Security Concerns:** Women and girls may face increased risks of gender-based violence, including sexual assault and trafficking, during displacement and resettlement. Ensuring their safety and providing safe spaces is crucial.
- **Family Responsibilities:** Women often bear the burden of caring for family members, particularly children and the elderly, during displacement. This can limit their ability to seek employment and access services.
- **Economic Impact:** Men may experience challenges in finding new employment opportunities and providing for their families. Economic strain can exacerbate stress and affect mental health.

- **Mental Health:** Women may experience higher levels of stress and trauma due to safety concerns and the pressures of caring for their families. Men may struggle with identity and purpose, particularly if they are unable to find work.

When relocated in the new community, there might be viewed some gender dimensions also in the support they might need. The following challenges can be observed by the families.

- **Access to Healthcare:** Women, especially those of reproductive age, may face challenges accessing necessary healthcare services such as prenatal and maternal care.
- **Education:** Children, particularly girls, may experience disruptions in education due to displacement. Ensuring access to education for all displaced children is essential.
- **Social Integration:** Both men and women may face challenges integrating into new communities, but women may face additional barriers due to cultural norms and expectations.
- **Empowerment and Agency:** Displaced women may have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes or community leadership, which can hinder their ability to advocate for their needs.
- **Legal and Documentation Challenges:** Women may face difficulties obtaining legal documents or proving their identity, impacting their access to services and employment.
- **Community Support:** Creating support networks for displaced women and men separately can help address their unique needs and provide peer-to-peer support.
- **Long-Term Impact on Identity and Roles:** Both men and women may experience shifts in their identities and societal roles due to displacement, which can have long-term effects on their sense of belonging and self-worth.

Similar to the situations described in the literature and observations of the international specialists, the results of the discussions with the NGO representatives allowed highlighting the several key points of the gender-based differences of the displacement of people from Artsakh:

- **Mental Health:** Women may experience higher levels of stress and trauma due to safety concerns and the pressures of caring for their families. Men may struggle with identity and purpose, particularly if they are unable to find work.

Impact on Women: Women faced increased fear of violence, including sexual violence, during the displacement. In the aftermaths, women experienced heightened economic challenges as many became the main breadwinners of their families after losing male family members who traditionally fulfilled this role. Thus, the displaced women faced numerous challenges, including economic hardship, social isolation, and increased responsibilities within their households.

Increased Incidents of Domestic Violence: After the war (including the first Karagakh War) the women were subjected to domestic violence, which was prevalent also after the 2020 war and right after the deportation, as the number of cases of violence has reportedly increased. The respondents observed a rise in domestic violence cases among displaced families from Artsakh. This increase was attributed to various factors, including trauma experienced during displacement, cultural differences, and the loss of traditional family structures. As families grappled with the challenges of displacement and resettlement, underlying tensions and unresolved trauma surfaced, leading to conflicts and violence within households.

Psychological Effects of War and Displacement: Individuals who served in the war have exhibited abusive behavior, even if they did not show signs of violence during their service. This abuse can manifest in various forms, including physical violence and controlling behavior. The psychological effects of war, such as trauma and radicalization, contribute to these behaviors. On the other hand, stereotypes and societal attitudes often normalize violence. This normalization leads to the dismissal of abusive behavior as not being recognized as violence. Awareness-raising efforts and therapy sessions are crucial in helping individuals recognize and address violent behavior. However, as reported by the partner NGOs who have been working with the displaced families, many of the displaced women lacked awareness of available resources and support services for victims of domestic violence. This lack of awareness, coupled with societal attitudes that justified or dismissed violence, prevented individuals from seeking help or recognizing their own experiences as violence.

Despite the mentioned specifics, in all other aspects, the families have been reportedly facing the same challenges and issues regardless of their member's gender. Overall, the respondents emphasized the critical importance of addressing gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities in the context of forced displacement.

They underscored the need for comprehensive support systems that address the economic, social, and psychological challenges faced by displaced women and their families. Additionally, efforts to combat domestic violence and promote gender equality were highlighted as essential components of post-displacement recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

Lessons Learnt

The partner NGO members noted that if similar situation occurs in future, they will act more coordinated and targeted based on the experience they gained during the 2020 and 2023 crisis situations. They emphasized the need for a better cooperation between the state and non-governmental structures to ensure that everybody receives the support and has access to provided information. The respondents underscored the importance of lessons learned from past experiences, such as the crisis observed during and after the 44-day war as well as the 2023 forced deportation. They noted that the Women's Fund Armenia's role in facilitating experience sharing and knowledge exchange among organizations enabled them to react quickly and effectively to the emerged crisis situation, and based on this gained experience they will know for sure how to react to future crises. This proactive approach to learning and adaptation strengthens the resilience of organizations and communities in the face of adversity.

The respondents highlighted the value of the Women's Fund Armenia's professional staff and their expertise. This expertise was viewed as particularly beneficial for smaller community organizations that may lack resources or connections. The Fund's staff was viewed as a guidance and mentorship provider, and as a supporter in navigating complex issues related to crisis response and feminist advocacy. The Women's Fund Armenia's international connections are seen as crucial for smaller organizations. These connections not only provide opportunities for collaboration and networking but also elevate the visibility of local organizations on a global scale. By opening doors to international partners and opportunities, the foundation enables smaller organizations to amplify their impact and reach. This is to say that the partners value a multifaceted support that the Women's Fund Armenia provides beyond financial assistance. From expertise and networking to advocacy and knowledge exchange, the foundation plays a crucial role in empowering organizations to respond to crisis situations and advance feminist goals.

Ideas for New Projects

According to the partners addressing the needs of the displaced individuals requires a comprehensive approach that includes awareness-raising, access to support services, and care. Among the ideas for new projects few were mentioned as highly demanded in all regions of Armenia and as ones that have direct link to the possibilities of women to work and earn money for the family.

- **Children's Development Centers:** Establishing development centers for children addresses the challenge of childcare, enabling parents, particularly women, to participate in projects and activities aimed at their empowerment and integration. These centers can provide a safe and nurturing environment where children can receive educational support, engage in recreational activities, and socialize with peers. Additionally, these centers can offer psycho-social support to children who may have experienced trauma due to displacement, helping them cope and thrive in their new environment. By alleviating the burden of childcare, women can actively engage in initiatives focused on their own well-being, skill development, and community integration.
- **Elderly Care and Support Programs:** Many displaced women may find themselves caring for elderly family members who require daily assistance and support. In other cases, a number of displaced elderly people happen to live alone in Armenia without appropriate care. Establishing programs tailored to the needs of elderly individuals, especially those living alone can provide essential services such as meal delivery, medication management, and home visits by trained caregivers. These programs not only ensure the well-being of elderly individuals but also alleviate the caregiving responsibilities placed on displaced women, allowing them to participate more fully in economic and social activities. Moreover, these initiatives foster a sense of community and solidarity among displaced individuals and promote intergenerational support networks.
- **Healthcare Certificates:** Access to healthcare is a fundamental right that should be available to all individuals, especially displaced women and their families. Providing healthcare certificates ensures that displaced women have access to essential medical services, including preventive care, treatment for chronic conditions, and maternal and child health services. These certificates can cover a range of healthcare expenses, including consultations, medications, diagnostic tests, and specialist referrals. By addressing barriers to healthcare access, such as affordability and documentation requirements, healthcare certificates promote the health and well-being of displaced women and contribute to their overall empowerment and resilience.

- **Community Integration and Support to Local Vulnerable Families:** Displacement often strains resources and exacerbates socio-economic disparities, affecting both displaced and host communities. Supporting local vulnerable families helps prevent marginalization and social tensions by addressing shared challenges and fostering mutual support networks. Initiatives can include livelihood support programs, vocational training, micro-enterprise development, and social protection measures tailored to the needs of vulnerable families. By promoting economic stability and social cohesion, these initiatives contribute to peaceful coexistence and integration between displaced and host communities, reducing the risk of conflicts and promoting mutual understanding and solidarity.

Overall, these proposed projects address the diverse needs and challenges faced by displaced women and their families, with a focus on childcare, elderly care, healthcare access, and community integration. By implementing these initiatives, organizations can empower displaced women, enhance their well-being, and facilitate their successful integration into their new communities.

Conclusions

The evaluation report highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by displaced individuals, particularly women, in the aftermath of the forced deportation from Nagorno Karabakh. The report underscores the critical role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian partners in mobilizing resources and providing support to address the immediate and long-term needs of displaced families.

- **Rapid Response and Humanitarian Aid**

NGOs demonstrated promptness and collaboration in responding to the crisis, mobilizing resources to provide immediate humanitarian aid such as food, shelter, and essential supplies to displaced families. The provision of ad-hoc grants for urgent needs proved crucial in meeting the growing demands for support.

- **Long-term Support and Integration**

Beyond immediate relief efforts, NGOs have embarked on mid-term and long-term projects to address the diverse needs of displaced individuals. These projects encompass psychosocial support, vocational training, cultural preservation, and community integration initiatives, aimed at fostering resilience and sustainable livelihoods among displaced populations.

- **Impact on Staff and Projects**

The crisis situation has negatively affected on NGO staff, leading to emotional, psychological, and professional burnout. Despite challenges, organizations have demonstrated adaptability and flexibility in adjusting project timelines and reallocating resources to address emerging needs.

- **Gender-specific Consequences**

As reported by the NGO members, there have occurred gender differences in the consequences of forced displacement, particularly concerning domestic violence and caregiving responsibilities. Women bear a disproportionate burden in caring for children and elderly family members, often limiting their participation in projects and initiatives aimed at their empowerment.

- **Role of Women's Fund Armenia**

The evaluations once again emphasized the crucial role of the Women's Fund Armenia beyond financial support, providing expertise, networking opportunities, and advocacy for feminist principles. Its international connections and promotion of feminist ideology empower smaller organizations to amplify their impact and address gender-based challenges effectively.

In conclusion, the evaluation report underscores the importance of sustained support and collaboration among NGOs, humanitarian partners, and local communities in addressing the complex needs of displaced individuals, particularly women and vulnerable groups. By prioritizing gender-sensitive approaches, promoting resilience, and fostering community integration, stakeholders can work towards building inclusive and sustainable solutions for those affected by crisis situations.