

3 April 2024

## **Council of Europe's comprehensive response package to the refugee influx in Armenia in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan 2023-2026 for Armenia**

In response to the significant influx of displaced persons and refugees to Armenia in September 2023, the Council of Europe has prepared a package of measures to support the country and strengthen the protection of refugees' human rights, particularly those of vulnerable groups. This response package is integral part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 which inter alia specifically identifies protecting human rights in the context of forced displacement in Armenia as one of its objectives.

The package of measures results from a visit by the **Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees** from 11 to 13 October 2023, during which she identified specific areas for support that are in line with the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Armenia (2023-2026) and the Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons within the context of migration and asylum (2021-25).

As part of the response package, the Council of Europe has launched four new initiatives and incorporated additional components into two ongoing projects. Collectively, these six projects aim to safeguard the human rights of the affected population.

"Through this dedicated and targeted package we will support our member state Armenia and its people, as they face unprecedented hardships and challenges", said Secretary General **Marija Pejčinović Burić**.

## **New Projects**

### **Strengthening Human Rights Safeguards**

This project aims to provide tailored support to Armenian authorities in addressing the needs of displaced persons and refugees, with a specific emphasis on strengthening human rights institutions, particularly the Human Rights Defender's Office and the Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The project's primary emphasis is to accompany the authorities towards operating with an advanced legislative and policy framework related to displaced persons, ensuring that the latter enjoy basic human rights per the European Convention on Human Rights and other European standards. It also focuses on enhancing the capacity of legal professionals, relevant national authorities, and civil society organisations to respond effectively to the needs of the displaced population. Furthermore, the project aims to facilitate access to information on rights and available services for displaced persons, ensuring they are well-informed about their entitlements and available support.

### **Enhancing Social Human Rights**

The project underscores the foundational role of social rights in democracy building. The project seeks to provide expert support for aligning national legislation on housing, employment, vocational training, and labour rights with European standards, adopting a comprehensive, gender-sensitive approach.

The project focuses on empowering national authorities to harmonise policies and practices with European standards, ensuring proper protection and implementation of social rights. It will contribute to strengthening the decision-makers' awareness of the procedure for accepting new provisions of the European Social Charter and the Collective Complaints procedure. It also focuses on capacity development for staff from the Human Rights Defender's Office, civil society organisations and legal professionals to effectively implement and monitor adherence to social rights in line with the European Social Charter and its case-law. Furthermore, the project aims to enhance awareness among displaced individuals and people from vulnerable groups about their rights and entitlements, emphasising their social rights and the availability of social services. Simultaneously, it seeks to elevate the understanding of national and local authorities concerning their roles, responsibilities, and the provision of social services at both national and local levels.

## **Protecting Children's Rights**

The project draws on the Council of Europe's expertise to safeguard children's rights in the aftermath of conflict. Aligned with the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, the project will support the implementation of the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in migration contexts.<sup>1</sup>

The project adopts a multifaceted approach to protect the rights of Armenian children in the post-war context by offering legal and policy support aligned with Council of Europe standards. Simultaneously, the project focuses on strengthening the capacities of civil servants, focal points, and other professionals to effectively safeguard the rights of Armenian children impacted by the conflict, including those who are unaccompanied and separated. In addition, the project aims to raise awareness among both children and parents about effective guardianship and the prevention of violence against children.

## **Support to Host Communities**

The project aims to assist local communities in responding effectively and with a human-rights focus to the influx of displaced population. As such, it recognises the critical role of local communities in providing safety, inclusion, and opportunities for refugees. The initiative focuses on establishing short- and long-term solutions to the crisis at the local level.

The project's twofold implementation strategy involves launching a grant scheme to address refugees' urgent and mid-term needs. It targets communities with a significant refugee population, with local authorities implementing grant projects in these areas. Additionally, to facilitate a shift from emergency response to effective resilience mechanisms, access to grants is contingent upon a commitment to implementing Resilience Building Strategies in accordance with Council of Europe standards and established toolkits.

## **Expanded Projects**

### **Promoting Gender Equality and Ending Violence against Women**

The project aims to promote gender equality, empower women, and combat violence against women and domestic violence by increasing knowledge and enhancing inter-agency cooperation in line with European standards and best practices. In response to the refugee crisis in Armenia, the ongoing project has introduced a new component focusing on safeguarding the rights of refugee women and girls.

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<sup>1</sup> CM/Rec(2019)11

Within this new component, the project specifically focuses on supporting the Armenian authorities in formulating policies and practices for the rights of refugee women and girls. This support is guided by relevant European standards, recommendations and strategies. Furthermore, the project aims to promote gender-sensitive economic and social inclusion and integration of women and girls in local communities, establish a platform for civil society's advocacy about the rights of refugee women and girls, as well as expand media specialists' skills in reporting on women refugees and victims of war.

### **Protection of Human Rights in Biomedicine**

The project seeks to promote awareness of European human rights and ethical standards in biomedicine and assist the Armenian authorities in aligning their legislation and practices with these standards.

The project introduced a new component to support Armenian authorities in their efforts to fully integrate nearly 2000 healthcare professionals from Karabakh into the Armenian healthcare system, by enhancing their skills and capacities through training sessions and capacity-building activities. Additionally, the project will address the mental health challenges of refugees, focusing mainly on healthcare professionals, by strengthening the skills of psychologists, social workers, and other professionals. Furthermore, through an extensive public outreach campaign, the project aims to raise awareness of sensitive topics and issues related to refugees among the Armenian population.