

Support to Nagorno-Karabakh Refugees in Ararat Region (Community Wellbeing: Resilience and Integration)

Final Report



The Community Wellbeing Project



**TURPANJIAN COLLEGE of
HEALTH SCIENCES**



FOUNDATION

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations.....	4
Summary	5
Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Project Components	9
1. Build Community Capacity to Foster Integration and Self-Reliance	9
Community Wellbeing Workers	9
Integration of Refugee Professionals into the Project Team	13
Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Mediation	13
Increasing Trust and Engagement	13
Promoting Economic Stability	13
Supporting Refugee Entrepreneurs	14
Modeling Recovery and Hope	14
Enhancing Program Effectiveness and Targeted Impact	14
Building Partnerships	15
Promote Community Integration and Empowerment by Building Strong and Inclusive Support Groups.....	16
2. Strengthen Access and Linkages to Social and Health Resources and Services.....	19
Identification and Mapping of Community Resources and Services	19
Assessment of the Current Living Environment and Identification of Risks for Wellbeing of Refugee People	20
The Process of Organizing Home Visits as a Means of Community Integration and Capacity Development	21
Supporting Refugees in Navigating Host Country Systems and Accessing Essential Resources and Services	23
Enhancing Access to Essential Services Through CWW Engagement	24
Building Strong Collaborative Networks for Enhanced Service Access	26
Development of an Information Hub for Resource Coordination.....	26
Promotion of Equity in Health.....	27
3. Promote Education and Skills Development within Target Populations.....	28
Training Programs and Workshops.....	28
Community Wellbeing: Strategies and Frameworks for Engagement	29

Legal Counselling	30
First Aid and Basic Life support	32
Hairdressing Training Program	33
Entrepreneurial Literacy	33
Strengthening Community Wellbeing Through Professional Development of Nurses	34
Awareness Raising Event for Nurses from Artsakh	35
Connect and Collaborate Stakeholder Meeting	35
Social and Health Campaigns.....	36
CWP and Pilibos: A Social-Cultural Campaign	36
Eye Health Campaign: Preventing Visual Impairment	37
Monitoring and Evaluation.....	37
Sustaining Program Impact and Engagement	38
Recommendations	38
Conclusion	39
Appendix 1	41
Home Visits.....	41
Appendix 2	42
Legal Counseling	42
Appendix 3	43
First Aid-CPR Workshops	43
.....	43
Appendix 4	44
Entrepreneurial Literacy	44
Appendix 5	45
Stakeholder Meeting	45

List of Abbreviations

AUA - American University of Armenia

BSN - Bachelor of Science in Nursing

CPD - Continuous Professional Development

CPR - Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation

CWP - Community Wellbeing Project

CWW - Community Wellbeing Worker

NGO - Non-Profit Organization

NK - Nagorno Karabakh

UCLA - University of California, Los Angeles

Summary

The Community Wellbeing Project (CWP) was a vital initiative aimed at supporting Nagorno-Karabakh refugees in Armenia's Ararat region, focusing on resilience, integration, and self-reliance. Implemented by the American University of Armenia (AUA) in collaboration with UCLA and funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the project addressed immediate and long-term needs through three core objectives: building community capacity, strengthening access to resources, and promoting education and skills development.

Key Achievements:

1. **Community Wellbeing Workers (CWWs):** Trained and deployed CWWs from the refugee community to facilitate integration, provide guidance, and connect refugees with essential services. These workers, under supervision of their coordinator and with significant support from project assistants played a central role in outreach, needs assessments, and organizing community events.
2. **Integration of Refugee Professionals:** Nineteen refugee professionals were integrated into the project team, enhancing trust, cultural mediation, and program effectiveness while providing economic stability for the participants.
3. **Community Engagement:** Over 375 individuals participated in 15 community conversations, fostering social cohesion and shared problem-solving. Tailored events for youth and women strengthened bonds within the community.
4. **Access to Services:** Home visits reached about 9,000 refugees in Ararat region, linking them to healthcare, legal aid, housing, and employment opportunities. Legal counseling sessions benefited 344 individuals and their families. Around 470 adults and children received eye care, including medication and spectacles.
5. **Education and Skills Development:** Training programs, including first aid, hairdressing, entrepreneurial literacy, and nursing professional development, equipped about 550 participants with valuable skills for self-reliance.
6. **Awareness Raising:** The program conducted health and social awareness campaigns through community events, administrative engagement, and social media, including a cross-cultural youth initiative with Pilibos Armenian School and an eye health campaign that raised awareness on eye health among parents of children, fostering social cohesion and preventive healthcare (reaching about 40,000 people).
7. **Connect Stakeholder:** Meeting and collaboration with representatives from 14 local and international organizations operating in Ararat region.

The project faced several challenges, including bureaucratic barriers, gaps in service coordination, housing insecurity, and limited access to mental health support. However, these were effectively addressed through adaptive strategies such as streamlining administrative processes, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and prioritizing refugee-led solutions. The project's flexibility and community-centered approach ensured that obstacles were overcome, paving the way for sustainable impact.

Introduction

From December 2022 to September 2023, Azerbaijan enforced an over 9-month blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) by blocking the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting NK to Armenia and the rest of the world. During this blockade, Azerbaijan cut off gas, electricity, food, water, medicine, and other essential supplies, resulting in a humanitarian crisis.

Following the blockade, on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched a full-scale military attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to the forced displacement of the entire population remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The military attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in hundreds of civilian injuries and deaths, including women and children, and thousands of individuals missing. In addition to the heavy missile strikes and bombing, the lack of communication, electricity, gas, food, medicine, and basic necessities, exacerbated the situation.

Within just one week of Azerbaijan’s military invasion, over 100,000 refugees from NK started arriving in the Republic of Armenia. According to UNHCR, the refugee population includes about 31% children and 18% elderly, and most arrived with few belongings and a need for urgent assistance including shelter, essential items, medical, and psychosocial support. According to October 2024 UNICEF report between 2020-2023 over 142,000 found refuge in the Republic of Armenia, around 115,400 of them fled in late September, 2023¹.

Thousands of refugees are currently being hosted in Armenian homes and shelters. The government of Armenia, civil society organizations, and various international agencies are making efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and implement programs to meet the immediate needs of the refugee population. However, the Nagorno-Karabakh



¹ “UNICEF Armenia Humanitarian Situation Report No. 16, 01 June - 31 August 2024 - Armenia | ReliefWeb,” October 10, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/unicef-armenia-humanitarian-situation-report-no-16-01-june-31-august-2024>.

refugee populations need further support to meet not only their immediate and urgent needs but to address their long-term social and health needs throughout this transition and integration and achieve an overall well-being.

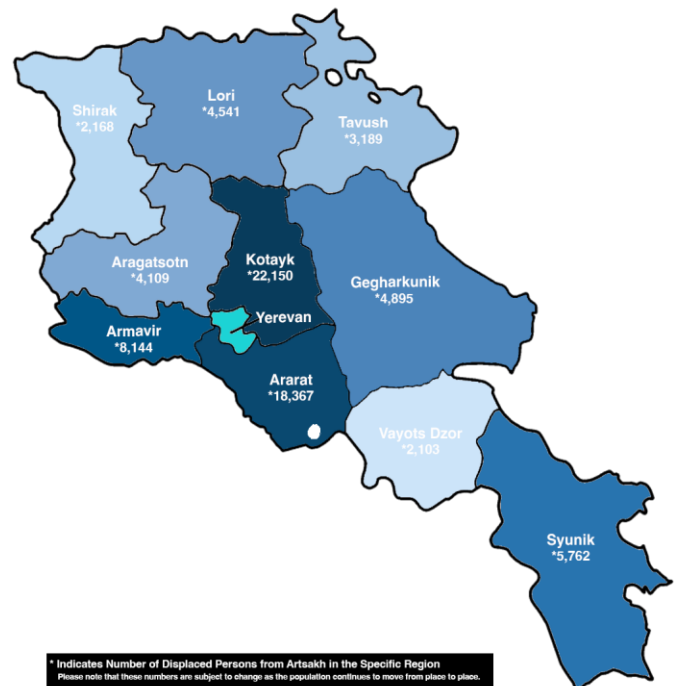
The current project, from now on Community Wellbeing Project (CWP), was a crucial and novel initiative to improve the overall wellbeing of the Nagorno-Karabakh refugee population currently residing in the Republic of Armenia. The project focused on building community capacity through Community Wellbeing Workers (CWWs), linking resources, and promoting education and outreach, to support and empower the population.

The project has been implemented by the Turpanjian College of Health Sciences of the American University of Armenia (AUA) in collaboration with the Fielding School of Public Health of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), starting December 2023 with funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

The project was designed to meet the following key objectives:

1. Build community capacity to foster integration and self-reliance
2. Strengthen access and linkages to social and health resources and services
3. Promote education and develop skills within the community

The project has been implemented in the Ararat region (marz) of Armenia, and the location was selected based on several key considerations, including the high number of refugees residing there and feasibility. The activities still continue thanks to the matching funds provided by UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.



Methodology

Current interventions for refugees typically focus on meeting immediate survival needs, such as food, shelter, and emergency healthcare, but often fall short in fostering community resilience and general well-being. Although psychosocial support programs exist in crisis settings, they seldom integrate community-based resilience-building efforts or prioritize well-being along with socio-economic support. Research highlights

that sustainable well-being among refugees is most effectively achieved through community-driven approaches that enhance autonomy, skill-building, and social cohesion^{2,3}. The CWP takes an innovative approach to address these gaps by utilizing CWWs to facilitate community-building activities, conduct educational workshops, and empower the communities. This project demonstrates the importance of participatory, capacity-building initiatives that empower refugees and promote social cohesion in the community and the society at large.

The design of CWP is in line with the WHO's concept for well-being⁴, which views health as a resource with social, mental, and physical components.

Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Well-being encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Focusing on wellbeing supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability. A society's well-being can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges. The aim of a wellbeing framework is to create social, health, economic, and environmental conditions that improve both individual and collective quality of life and give people and societies a sense of meaning and purpose. With its emphasis on capacity-building, resilience, and self-reliance, CWP provides a sustainable and replicable model that is both novel and needed in the Armenian setting.



² Global Trends Report 2022. UNHCR. Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

³ Arab RAE, Somerville J, Abuadas FH, Rubinat-Arnaldo E, Sagbakken M. Health and well-being of refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and internally displaced persons under COVID-19: a scoping review. *Front Public Health*. 2023;11:1145002. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2023.1145002

⁴ Achieving well-being, WHO. Accessed November 4, 2024. [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/health-promotion/framework4wellbeing-\(draft\).pdf?sfvrsn=c602e78f_3&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/health-promotion/framework4wellbeing-(draft).pdf?sfvrsn=c602e78f_3&download=true)

Project Components

1. Build Community Capacity to Foster Integration and Self-Reliance

Community Wellbeing Workers

a. Establish a team of Community Well-Being Workers to assist with the integration of the refugee population into their host communities and to promote self-reliance. Recruit and train CWW.

The recruitment process of CWWs involved collaboration with representatives of the host community's administration and civil society, as well as the community of those refugees after the 2020 war and the refugees of 2023, along with their active volunteer team. As a result of this collaboration, 30 participants were selected for the training. The selection process was carried out with a strong commitment to fairness and equal opportunity for all candidates while upholding the principles of transparency and accountability.

Those 30 participants underwent a comprehensive training program, covering community wellbeing framework, community organizing and engagement, legal aspects of forced displacement, social determinants of health and well-being, effective communication, health promotion and education, motivational interviewing and community engagement, service coordination and navigation skills and trauma-informed programming. See more details and photos from the training here

<https://newsroom.aua.am/2024/03/18/aua-ucla-launch-community-wellbeing-project-armenia/> .

The next phase was the selection of CWWs from the 30 trained participants. Five candidates were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Focusing on the individual's skills, experience, and potential while eliminating personal biases.
- Using structured interviews and assessment methods to ensure a fair comparison of candidates.

In the initial proposal, the plan was to consider hiring 10 of the 20 trained participants on a part-time basis. However, during the implementation phase, it became evident that part-time roles would not be sufficient to meet the demands of working with a refugee. Given the complexity and intensity of the required support, a decision was made to instead consider hiring 5 full-time workers, ensuring greater continuity, engagement, and effectiveness in service delivery. They were provided training materials and information packages that they constantly use while working with the refugee

population. Most of the information package is electronic and is being updated frequently.

The CWWs, under supervision of the CWW Coordinator and with significant support from project assistants, had a central role and were extensively involved in almost all key project activities. They were themselves representatives of the forcibly displaced community and also reside in the project's target region of Ararat. After the initial comprehensive training due to operational assessments a decision was made to hire three full time CWWs; later two more joined them. The CWWs bring a rich and diverse combination of experiences that uniquely equip them to support the refugees. Their backgrounds include firsthand experience of displacement, extensive involvement in volunteer and community-based initiatives, and expertise in managing complex logistical challenges during crises. One adapted to life in the host community after being forcibly displaced in 2020, providing critical support during both the 2020 and 2023 displacement waves. Another had a history of displacement dating back to 1988, with a background as a teacher who has worked with both refugee and host community children. The third brought valuable experience in relocating critically ill patients during a nine-month blockade, showcasing resilience and strong crisis management skills. Together, these diverse experiences enabled them to effectively address the multifaceted needs of refugees.

The main responsibilities of a CWW included building community capacity to foster integration and self-reliance, strengthening access and linkages to social and health resources and services, promoting education and skills development within the target populations, and collaborating and coordinating with local and regional organizations and agencies (governmental and non-governmental). In addition, the CWWs were well familiar with Armenia's health and social services, systems, laws, and regulations, as well as community resources to effectively support and empower individuals and communities. A thorough understanding of the available services and support systems enabled CWWs to provide accurate information, navigate complex processes, and advocate for the needs of community members.

In addition to the main training, the hired CWWs underwent comprehensive and ongoing training and professional development opportunities to ensure successful implementation of the program while encouraging long-term growth and workforce development for the refugee population, promoting livelihood and ethical standards.

To effectively engage the CWWs in their work activities, the following steps were taken:

- Provided CWWs with training materials and information packages to support their work with the refugee population. Most of the information package was in electronic format and was regularly updated.

- Facilitated introductions to local self-government authorities and regional leaders of health and social services, bridging the gap between refugees and these services to ensure appropriate support.
- Established a regular, weekly training schedule with supervisors and offered ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure the program's successful implementation and to enhance their employability.

The essential duties of the CWWs have been the following:

- Assist individuals/families in connecting and navigating health and social systems and processes
- Conduct individual, family, and community needs and wellbeing assessments
- Organize community trainings, community events, and workshops
- Establish relationships with governmental and non-governmental local and regional organizations, agencies, and subject matter experts within the community
- Conduct outreach and build community engagement.

The core functions of the CWWs are described below:

Building Community Capacity

- Engage with community members to identify strengths, needs, and opportunities for growth.
- Facilitate community meetings and discussions to encourage collaboration and collective action.
- Provide training and support to empower community members to take ownership of their well-being.

Strengthening Access and Linkages

- Assist individuals and families in navigating health and social systems and processes.
- Advocate for accessible and equitable services for all community members.
- Develop partnerships with local service providers to enhance access to resources and support.

Promoting Education and Skills Development

- Organize workshops, trainings, and educational sessions on relevant topics, such as health literacy, job readiness, etc.

Collaborating and Coordinating

- Establish relationships with local and regional organizations, and agencies to leverage resources and expertise.
- Participate in collaborative initiatives and working groups to address community needs and priorities.

Conducting Outreach and Building Engagement

- Reach out to vulnerable/underserved population groups to promote awareness of available resources and services.
- Build trust and rapport with community members through active listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.

Other Duties

- Adapt to emerging needs and priorities within the community.
- Collaborate with supervisors and colleagues to meet organizational goals and objectives.
- Take on additional responsibilities as assigned to contribute to the overall success of the initiative.

As a community well-being worker, it is critical to follow high ethical standards and maintain strict confidentiality to ensure the trust and wellbeing of the community members. The project team has developed guidelines to help the CWWs protect their privacy and respect the dignity of the target community:

- Treat all community members with respect, dignity, and compassion, regardless of their background, beliefs, or circumstances.
- Recognize and uphold the right of individuals to make their own choices and decisions about their lives and wellbeing.
- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding any personal or sensitive information shared by community members during interactions.
- Store and handle confidential information securely to prevent unauthorized access or disclosure.
- Obtain informed consent from community members before collecting any personal information or engaging in activities that may involve sharing personal experiences or data.
- Maintain professional boundaries in all interactions with community members, refraining from engaging in personal relationships or activities that could compromise their objectivity or integrity.

Integration of Refugee Professionals into the Project Team

One of the key outcomes of the CWP was the successful integration of 19 refugee professionals into the project team: including the project coordinator, CWWs, drivers, project staff, legal consultants, interviewers, and others. The primary selection criterion was their high level of professional qualifications, ensuring that their expertise contributed to the effectiveness of the program. The involvement of refugees in the program team significantly enhanced the overall effectiveness of the initiative for several key reasons:

Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Mediation

refugees often face communication challenges, particularly when dealing with legal or administrative terminology, which can create significant barriers to accessing their rights. By incorporating professionals who share the same linguistic and cultural background, the program was able to reduce communication obstacles and ensure that beneficiaries better understood their rights and responsibilities.

Increasing Trust and Engagement

Many refugees experience distrust toward the state or public institutions. However, they were more willing to connect with the project team members who had shared similar experiences. This trust-building process encouraged beneficiaries to engage more actively in program activities, reducing skepticism toward critical information and services.

Promoting Economic Stability

Beyond leveraging the professional potential of refugees, integrating them into the program team also provided a source of income, contributing to their socio-economic stability. Priority was given to refugees during the selection process for project staff. They all went through an intensive training program led by AUA experts, equipping them with valuable professional skills. As a result, they all gained industry recognition and secured new job opportunities after the project ended.

For example:

- The Program Coordinator was selected based on professional qualifications, strong connections with the refugee community, and an instrumental role in selecting and coordinating other refugee program participants. Their involvement enhanced beneficiary engagement, improved communication efficiency, and ensured the targeted implementation of program activities.

- The program provided stable and competitive incomes to the CWWs who supported families that included minors, war-injured individuals, and pensioners. Beyond financial support, continuous training and supervision sessions helped enhance their professional and soft skills, improving their employability in the new labor market beyond the duration of the project.
- Other staff members provided transportation services, catering services, actively assisted in fieldwork and supported social aid distribution, demonstrating full engagement and commitment as essential team members.

Supporting Refugee Entrepreneurs

The program prioritized contracting refugee service providers for logistics, catering, and other project needs:

- Catering and other services, merchandise purchasing for the program needs, meetings and training sessions were primarily provided by refugees and organizations offering appropriate services. The project had supported them through legal consultation and facilitated equipment purchases via partner organizations. Through this collaboration, the project not only offered financial support during a period of crisis but also helped them improve their livelihood skills.

Modeling Recovery and Hope

The presence of refugee team members who had successfully navigated displacement challenges provided real-life examples of resilience to beneficiaries. Seeing individuals who had overcome similar difficulties helped eliminate feelings of hopelessness and motivated beneficiaries to take proactive steps in exercising their rights and rebuilding their lives.

Enhancing Program Effectiveness and Targeted Impact

By directly engaging refugee professionals, the project team gained firsthand knowledge of the specific challenges and needs of beneficiaries. This insider perspective allowed for the development of more effective and targeted interventions, ensuring that program activities were highly relevant and practical for the refugee.

Building Partnerships

For the effective implementation of the program, several key steps were undertaken, focusing on collaboration, resource mapping, and strategic partnerships. Close cooperation with regional and local authorities, non-profit organizations (NGO), and other organizations allowed for a thorough mapping of available resources, a clear definition of activity scopes, and the alignment of efforts to support the mutual adaptation of refugee and host communities. Through direct engagement with local self-government bodies, we gathered comprehensive information not only on national and regional services but also on local and international organizations working in the program's mission areas. This process played a crucial role in optimizing the program's resources and fostering a collegial network among stakeholders. Regular coordination meetings and the integration of activities across different organizations further strengthened collaboration, facilitating knowledge-sharing and mutual support. Additionally, ongoing engagement with regional and local authorities proved essential in reaching vulnerable families more efficiently and establishing trusted partnerships, ultimately enhancing the program's impact and sustainability.

The following details outline the sequence of programmatic actions:

- The program was formally presented to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia, the governmental body responsible for coordinating territorial and local self-government bodies. Regular consultations were held with the Deputy Minister overseeing this sector, during which the CWP was introduced and subsequently endorsed. The ministry reaffirmed the decision to implement the program in the Ararat region and, following its recommendation, prioritized launching the initiative in the Masis extended community. Masis holds particular significance as a host community for refugees. In the 1980s, it became a refuge for Armenians fleeing the massacres in Soviet Azerbaijan. More recently, following the 2020 war, the community received another wave of forcibly refugees. By 2023, approximately 44.5% of all refugees settled in the Ararat region lived in the Masis community, highlighting its strategic importance for program implementation.
- Additionally, an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia to establish a framework for collaboration. This includes ongoing discussions to review the program's progress, achievements, and successes, as well as to identify and address any challenges or obstacles encountered during implementation. Furthermore, the need to present the program to the relevant territorial

authority—the Governor of the Ararat region—was also discussed to ensure effective coordination at the regional level.

- The process of establishing relationships with local self-government bodies commenced in the Masis community of Ararat region, in alignment with recommendations from state and territorial authorities responsible for implementing territorial governance policies. This decision was further reinforced by a pilot community selection study conducted by the program, which assessed and validated Masis as the most suitable location for piloting the initiative.

In the selected Masis community, the implementation of CWP commenced through a collaborative dialogue with the Local Self-Government Body. The discussions centered on defining cooperation frameworks, exploring opportunities for partner engagement, and integrating insights from both host and refugee communities' experiences to enhance the program's effectiveness.

- At the territorial governance level, the program was subsequently presented to the Governor of the Ararat region, who serves as the Government's representative in implementing territorial policies. During discussions, the importance of similar programs was emphasized, highlighting their role in addressing regional needs. Additionally, a strong commitment was expressed to supporting initiatives aimed at strengthening community capacity and enhancing the integration and self-sufficiency of refugees. The CWP program was recognized as a key initiative in this regard, with assurances of collaboration to facilitate its successful implementation.
- Collaboration steps following a similar procedure have been implemented in four other communities of Ararat region—Artashat, Ararat, Vedi, and Verin Dvin—focusing on the program's implementation process through engagement and joint efforts with local self-government bodies. In these communities, potential avenues for cooperation have also been discussed, with broad support in strengthening community capacity and facilitating the integration and self-sufficiency of refugees.

Promote Community Integration and Empowerment by Building Strong and Inclusive Support Groups

Various opportunities were explored within the program framework to support community members through training and capacity-building, with the goal of enhancing their socio-economic potential and promoting self-sufficiency. The proposed initiatives aimed to equip individuals with practical skills, including job searching, securing housing, accessing state social and healthcare services, and obtaining legal and

financial assistance. These training sessions combined theoretical knowledge with hands-on approaches to facilitate smoother integration into the host society and enable active participation in their new community.

A key component of the project was the formation of professional and psychosocial support groups to strengthen community ties and rebuild social connections. However, it became evident that a more detailed understanding of refugees' specific training needs was required, as the available data at the time were insufficient. To address this gap, discussions were held on conducting home visits to assess both the needs and strengths of refugees. This process involved designing a structured questionnaire, preparing pre-tests, and training CWW interviewers to ensure accurate and effective data collection. Clarifying the training needs of refugees was expected to enhance the program's effectiveness and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the community.

Another critical aspect of the project was the creation of support groups to facilitate community integration and empowerment. These groups were envisioned as central to establishing platforms for social connection, fostering a sense of belonging, and accelerating the integration of refugees into their new communities.

Diversity and inclusivity were prioritized in forming these groups, ensuring participation across gender, age, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic status while also considering the unique needs of different groups.

A strategic approach to fostering social support networks was through structured group meetings and community discussions—referred to as "community dialogue." These gatherings were not only designed to provide practical assistance but also to offer moral support, a crucial element in fostering self-reliance and confidence. This, in turn, contributed to creating a more resilient and cohesive community, better prepared to face challenges.

To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of these support groups, it was essential to first assess the needs of beneficiaries and the existing level of social connections within the community. Home visits emerged as the most effective method for conducting this assessment, allowing for a deeper understanding of individual and collective needs, identifying available resources, and ensuring that the groups were aligned with the social potential and preferences of refugees.

A crucial component of the CWP was the implementation of Community Conversations, which served as a platform for authentic and meaningful community engagement. These gatherings provide a safe and supportive space for members of the forcibly displaced Artsakh community to share their experiences, express emotions, and empower one another. Through these conversations, participants reflect on their past, address current challenges, and articulate their hopes for the future. This process

fosters trust, strengthens resilience, and cultivates a sense of belonging among those navigating displacement, loss, and rebuilding.

By connecting over shared experiences, community conversations promote emotional healing and help establish informal support networks, ensuring that participants feel heard, understood, and supported in their journey.

Community conversations are a collaborative effort between the CWWs and local community members. These gatherings have taken place in various villages, with diverse groups of participants. To date, 15 community conversations have been held, engaging over 375 participants. The community conversations were specifically tailored to youth, women, and cultural themes. There were four youth-focused events with 213 participants, four cultural events with 106 participants, and seven women-focused events with 56 participants.

The format of these gatherings is flexible, ranging from casual conversations to backyard events incorporating cooking, shared meals, and cultural activities. This integration of traditional dialogue and cultural elements creates a profound sense of belonging and "home" among participants. By fostering organic, community-driven discussions, CWP encourages individuals to take ownership of these events and continue organizing them independently, promoting sustained engagement and support.

Beyond storytelling, discussions within community conversations evolve into brainstorming, practical problem-solving, and long-term planning. Participants exchange solutions to daily challenges as well as broader systemic issues, including housing, employment, legal concerns, and social integration.

Beyond supporting refugees, community conversations play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and strengthening broader community relationships. By creating spaces for interaction between refugee and host community members, these discussions facilitate mutual understanding, shared problem-solving, and relationship-building. This inclusive approach fosters a culture of empathy, support, and collaboration, helping to break down barriers and create stronger, more unified communities.

The CWP team plays a key role in facilitating these conversations by:

- Fostering meaningful connections between participants
- Providing emotional support as individuals navigate displacement
- Guiding discussions on pressing issues and challenges
- Empowering participants to voice their needs and concerns

Through these efforts, participants not only feel acknowledged and heard but are also encouraged to identify solutions, act, and support one another.

See a story on some of the Community Conversations and photos
<https://newsroom.aua.am/2024/09/30/community-conversations-provide-safe-and-supportive-spaces-for-connection-healing-and-empowerment/> .

2. Strengthen Access and Linkages to Social and Health Resources and Services

Identification and Mapping of Community Resources and Services

A crucial step in ensuring that refugees could fully access community resources and services was the identification and mapping of available programs offered by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. This process involved a series of coordinated actions aimed at creating a clear and accessible pathway to essential support systems.

To begin, a comprehensive list of services provided by various governmental and non-governmental organizations was compiled. This list offered a detailed overview of available community resources, providing brief descriptions of the types of assistance accessible to refugees. The resources were categorized by sector, including healthcare, social support, education, legal aid, employment, and housing assistance, ensuring that refugees could navigate the support system more effectively.

To further enhance accessibility, a mapping process was undertaken to visually locate and categorize community resources across different communities and municipalities. This initiative aimed to create a geographic representation of available services, making it easier for refugees and service providers to identify relevant support systems based on location.

In parallel, an accessibility assessment was conducted to evaluate how easily refugees could physically, socially, and economically access these resources. The assessment revealed that in many cases, barriers to accessibility existed, including a lack of awareness about available services, affordability issues, and socio-cultural differences that limited effective utilization. Addressing these barriers required a proactive approach in ensuring that information about services was widely disseminated, and that refugees were supported in overcoming structural challenges.

To strengthen coordination efforts, the project also established collaboration with governmental and civil society organizations. A database of relevant institutions, including local government bodies, territorial administrations, and civil society organizations, was compiled to facilitate structured cooperation. This initiative set the foundation for future joint efforts in improving service delivery and ensuring that refugees had access to the necessary support mechanisms.

Through the systematic identification, mapping, and accessibility assessment of community resources, the project played a key role in enhancing service availability and utilization for refugees. By bridging gaps between existing support systems and the refugee, the initiative contributed to improved integration and self-reliance, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Assessment of the Current Living Environment and Identification of Risks for Wellbeing of Refugee People

The success of community empowerment and the integration of refugees relies on having solid data on their needs, strengths, and social potential. We combined focus group discussions and home visits, as assessment tools. The assessments not only provided information on the target population but also helped to build trust among the refugees living in Ararat region.

To ensure the effectiveness of home visits, a structured questionnaire was developed, guided by key principles:

- Collection of demographic data: This included information on age, gender, family composition, education, employment, and other socio-economic indicators.
- Needs assessment: The questionnaire covered multiple dimensions, such as:
 - Healthcare needs
 - Social support requirements
 - Educational and employment opportunities
 - Housing and living conditions
- Identification of strengths: A set of scales was designed to assess self-sufficiency, social connections, adaptability, and community engagement. These scales were grounded in social psychology and community development theories, ensuring their accuracy and practical applicability.

A pre-test phase was conducted to evaluate the usability and reliability of the questionnaire in real field conditions. During this phase:

1. A small but representative group of beneficiaries was selected.
2. Trained CWW interviewers conducted interviews to test the clarity and comprehension of the questions.
3. Collected data were analyzed to identify any misunderstandings or necessary modifications, leading to the finalization of the home visit questionnaire.

This rigorous scientific process allowed for the development of a comprehensive yet field-friendly assessment tool. The refined methodology serves as a foundation for targeted needs assessment, support group formation, and the design of community integration strategies tailored to refugees.

All the CWWs went through a training on:

- Principles of question formulation: Ensuring clarity, neutrality, and cultural sensitivity.
- Interviewing methodology: Providing ethical and professional communication guidelines for engaging with beneficiaries.
- Data recording procedures: Standardizing the process to ensure consistency and comparability of collected information.

The project team used Kobo Toolbox to house the data collected from the home visits and run relevant analyses. The CWWs completed the standardized home visit form after each visit using hard copy forms and then completed data entry through Kobo Toolbox.

The Process of Organizing Home Visits as a Means of Community Integration and Capacity Development

In each settlement, we established direct and active collaboration with administrative leaders, as they possess the authority to provide relevant data. This partnership facilitated the identification of refugee families, the mapping of their distribution, and the creation of accurate household lists. The selection of settlements for each planned home visit was based on several key criteria. The number of refugee families played a crucial role in determining the duration of the visit. In cases where the number of families was large, the visit extended over multiple days, requiring involvement of additional CWWs.

Before each visit, the CWP coordinator contacted the administrative leader of the respective settlement to introduce the program, outlining its collaboration with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and explaining the selection process for the Ararat region. The success of the pilot project in the Masis community was highlighted, along with plans for regional expansion. The objectives of the visit were clarified, emphasizing the strengthening of community resilience, the implementation of regional and local programs, and the inclusion of refugee families. Agreements were established regarding the exact date and time of the visit, the introduction of CWWs, the identification of meeting locations, preparation of lists of refugee families, and the possibility of providing addresses. Additional support for meetings and assistance was also coordinated in advance to ensure an efficient process.

Prior to entering each settlement, a preparatory discussion was held with the CWWs to review geographical and logistical details, assess road accessibility, and evaluate potential challenges in collaboration with the administrative leader. Political neutrality was emphasized, ensuring that the team maintained an unbiased approach regardless of local political affiliations. A brief presentation of the CWP program was conducted to highlight its community-based approach and its role in fostering stronger connections between refugee and host communities. Additionally, program-branded items such as notebooks, pens, or tote bags were distributed to community partners to foster positive perception of the program.

Strong collaboration with local authorities facilitated direct engagement with refugee families. As a result, home visits conducted by CWWs reached over 70% of the refugees, surpassing the initial target of 50%. This outcome significantly contributed to the broader objective of enhancing community resilience and integration.

Overall, the CWWs visited 2,382 households in Ararat region including 63 villages and Masis city, overall covering 8,960 individuals. Through these house visits, more than 32% of the households received material and financial support through the project (see photos from home visits in [Appendix 1](#)).

Through village visits, home visits, and regular meetings, the project conducted a comprehensive assessment of the living conditions of refugees, with the goal of identifying key risks to their well-being. The assessment examined housing conditions, access to healthcare, socio-economic stability, and community integration, using both quantitative and qualitative data.

The key findings of the assessment were as follows:

1. Barriers to Healthcare Access

- Despite certain healthcare benefits provided by the government, many refugees struggled to access medical services due to lack of information and the physical inaccessibility of healthcare facilities.
- The lack of mental health services and post-trauma support was identified as a particularly critical gap in available healthcare provisions.

2. Inadequate Housing Conditions

- The vast majority of refugees continue to live in temporary shelters, hotels, or substandard rental housing, significantly impacting their physical and psychological well-being.
- Many of these accommodations lack basic living conditions, making daily life extremely difficult.

- All refugees unanimously identified housing insecurity as their most urgent and pressing challenge.
3. Socio-Economic Risks
 - Unstable housing conditions, difficulties in the job market, and income insecurity have deepened the social vulnerability of refugees.
 - Many are experiencing increased poverty and uncertainty about their future, further exacerbating their psychological distress.
 4. Community Isolation and Breakdown of Social Networks
 - Many refugees have struggled to integrate into new communities, facing social isolation, lack of support networks, and increased psychological stress.
 - The absence of strong community ties has made it harder for them to access informal support systems that could otherwise help them navigate their displacement.
 5. Lack of Coordination and Targeting in Assistance Programs
 - Support provided by various organizations and NGOs often fails to reach all intended beneficiaries, leading to gaps in aid distribution.
 - Assistance is frequently concentrated on specific individuals or groups, while many other vulnerable families are regularly left out of all forms of support.
 6. Legal and Bureaucratic Challenges
 - There is a systemic lack of comprehensive legal solutions for the challenges faced by refugees.
 - In many cases, bureaucratic hurdles and artificial administrative barriers have further complicated their ability to access services and claim their rights.

Supporting Refugees in Navigating Host Country Systems and Accessing Essential Resources and Services

As part of the CWP, numerous initiatives were implemented to assist refugees in navigating Armenia's governmental and non-governmental systems, developing the necessary skills to access available services, and ultimately promoting self-reliance and independence.

The key activities undertaken included:

1. Information Support and Counseling (Including Legal Assistance with 73 beneficiaries)
 - Individual and group consultation sessions were organized, where specialists provided detailed information about healthcare, social services, education, housing, and employment opportunities available to refugees.
2. Expanding Access to Medical and Social Services (68 beneficiaries)
 - CWWs assisted refugees in registering for primary healthcare services, ensuring they could access needed psychological support by linking them with partner organizations providing such services.
 - They also guided beneficiaries on how to access free or subsidized medical care.
3. Labor Market Orientation and Economic Self-Sufficiency Promotion (23 beneficiaries)
 - Employment orientation sessions and networking meetings were organized to help refugees understand the labor market and connect with potential job opportunities, thereby facilitating income generation and financial stability.
4. Practical Guidance and Simplification of Bureaucratic Processes (32 beneficiaries)
 - Beneficiaries received personalized assistance in navigating state and non-state institutions, including support with document processing, registrations, and application submissions.

All refugees who approached the program received guidance and support in effectively accessing both governmental and non-governmental services. As a result, their self-reliance and independence significantly improved, empowering them to better integrate into their host communities.

Enhancing Access to Essential Services Through CWW Engagement

Through the active participation of CWWs, the program significantly contributed to improving refugees' access to healthcare, social services, education, housing, and legal support. This was achieved through targeted guidance, assistance, and community integration efforts, particularly through the following key interventions:

1. Facilitating Access to Social Support

- CWWs played a crucial role in connecting beneficiaries with Armenia's social assistance programs, helping them navigate the process of applying for financial aid, benefits, and other social support initiatives.

2. Expanding Educational Opportunities

- Refugee children and youth received information and support on enrolling in public schools and vocational training institutions, as well as assistance with admission processes and credential recognition.
- CWWs actively assisted families who, due to frequent relocations and changes in rental housing, needed to re-enroll their children in new kindergartens, schools, and other educational institutions.
- Special efforts were made to support students who had been forced to leave higher education due to the blockade and subsequent displacement from Artsakh, providing them with legal guidance and placement assistance in Armenian public and private universities.

3. Assessing and Addressing Housing Needs

- Housing needs assessments were conducted to identify urgent accommodation challenges.
- Beneficiaries were connected with governmental and NGO-supported housing programs to secure suitable living conditions.

4. Rebuilding Community Networks

- Refugee families were linked with one another, enabling collective housing solutions in rural communities, which helped restore social connections and reduce isolation.
- Regular community conversations and meetings facilitated the reunion of neighbors and friends who had lost contact during displacement, strengthening social cohesion within host communities.

5. Providing Legal Support (more details on this below)

- Legal assistance needs were identified through home visits, community meetings, and individual requests, ensuring that refugees were connected with specialized legal consultation services.
- In collaboration with partner organizations and legal experts who were also refugees, tailored legal support mechanisms were established to address key concerns.

These targeted interventions not only improved access to essential services but also promoted greater self-sufficiency, resilience, and social integration among refugees.

Building Strong Collaborative Networks for Enhanced Service Access

A key focus of the program was the establishment of robust collaborative networks, bringing together various organizations and groups to facilitate refugees' access to essential resources and services. By fostering strategic partnerships, the program ensured that refugees could more efficiently navigate available support systems and benefit from integrated services.

Collaboration extended across governmental and non-governmental organizations, community groups, schools, healthcare institutions, social service agencies, and employers, all working toward the shared goal of linking and integrating community resources. This collective effort streamlined service accessibility, allowing refugees to more easily connect with the support they needed.

Beyond individual and sector-specific partnerships, the program successfully organized an unprecedented multi-stakeholder meeting, where key actors came together to discuss the challenges faced by refugees and explore collaborative solutions. The meeting served as a platform to align efforts, identify community-level concerns, and strategize effective interventions, leading to a commitment to ongoing collaboration and regular coordination meetings.

This collaborative approach became a cornerstone of the program's success, significantly enhancing resource accessibility and improving service integration for refugees. By bridging gaps between service providers and beneficiaries, the program contributed to a more effective, inclusive, and responsive support system.

Development of an Information Hub for Resource Coordination

As part of the program, an information hub was created and visualized as an online platform, mapping programs and their geographic coverage. This platform was shared with partner organizations and key stakeholders, serving as a centralized repository for essential information on available resources and services.

By consolidating all critical data in one accessible space, the platform ensures that refugees can better navigate available programs, while also enabling stakeholders to coordinate efforts more effectively. The ongoing use and updates of this hub will facilitate targeted program implementation, minimizing duplication of services and ensuring that resources reach those most in need (See photos from legal counseling events/sessions in [Appendix 2](#)).

Promotion of Equity in Health

We organized a large-scale community eye health event. This initiative aimed to support forcibly displaced people from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) residing in Ararat province. The program aimed to address visual impairments and blindness within this vulnerable population by offering comprehensive eye examinations and distributing eyeglasses and medications.

From October to November 2024, the experienced team of the Meghriyan Institute conducted comprehensive eye screenings in Ararat province. The screening campaign targeted individuals aged 50 and older, a group at higher risk for age-related vision disorders. Over the course of this period, a total of 378 people underwent thorough ophthalmic examinations. Following the screenings, in January 2025, the Meghriyan Institute provided corrective eyeglasses to those diagnosed with uncorrected refractive errors and unaddressed presbyopia. In total, 454 eyeglasses were distributed, improving the vision and daily functionality of the project participants. Some of them received two eyeglasses for both near and far vision. Additionally, 66 participants diagnosed with various eye diseases, including cataract, glaucoma, and dry eye diseases received necessary medication to effectively manage their conditions. Patients requiring specialized treatment beyond the scope of this initiative were referred to advanced ophthalmic centers for further medical interventions.

The story and photos from the activity are presented here:

<https://newsroom.aua.am/2025/02/13/meghriyan-institute-provides-eye-care-forcibly-displaced-people-nagorno-karabakh/>

We organized a community event to celebrate World Sight Day 2024. The program aimed to reduce visual impairment among school-aged children forcibly displaced from Artsakh by providing comprehensive eye examinations, offering eyeglasses and medications to those in need, and increasing awareness about eye health by distributing educational materials on eye care to children and their parents/caregivers. The project team conducted eye screenings among 89 school-aged children in the Masis community, Ararat Marz. Children diagnosed with uncorrected refractive errors or eye diseases received free eyeglasses and medication. Those who were diagnosed with eye diseases that required advanced care were referred to specialized ophthalmic centers.

In addition to the ophthalmic examination, the project team distributed educational materials on healthy eye care practices for children and their parents, detailing important recommendations and tips for taking good eye care. These practices will help children save their vision and reduce risks leading to eye problems.

The story and photos from the activity are presented here:

<https://newsroom.aua.am/2024/10/30/aua-meghri-gian-institute-observes-world-sight-day/>

Around 467 refugee people benefited from ophthalmic care, when needed received treatment and spectacles.

3. Promote Education and Skills Development within Target Populations

Training Programs and Workshops

Training programs and workshops were a key component of the CWP, designed to equip participants with practical skills, professional knowledge, and opportunities for self-reliance and integration. The project team partnering with local and regional community leadership successfully implemented a series of training programs and workshops, reaching a diverse range of community members.

In total, 893 individuals participated in the various training, awareness raising sessions on how to get financial and legal support, which included:

- Community Wellbeing: Strategies and Frameworks for Engagement – Training for approximately 117 community advocates and representatives from local organizations and government bodies on community mobilization and engagement, resilience building, and integration of vulnerable groups.
- Legal Counseling - Provided over 344 refugees with tailored legal support through home visit assessments, group and individual consultations, and collaborations with experts and local authorities, addressing key concerns such as documentation, social security, and employment while fostering community engagement, social integration, and economic stability.
- First Aid and Basic Life Support – About 225 educators from preschools and schools trained in emergency response skills.
- Hairdressing Training Program – 19 individuals from Artsakh, including five from the CWP target community, completed a three-month intensive training and received professional sets of hairdresser equipment.
- Entrepreneurial Literacy – 15 refugees from Artsakh attended business skills training.
- Strengthening Community Wellbeing Through Professional Development of Nurses – 65 nurses completed CPD training and received continuous nursing education credits from the Ministry of Health.

- Awareness Raising Event for Nurses from Artsakh - An awareness-raising event for invited over 108 refugee nurses from Artsakh.

In addition to the listed activities, the project team has collaborated with stakeholders working in Ararat region bringing together representatives from 14 local and international organizations operating in the region.

Programs are further detailed in the sections below, highlighting- their impact and outcomes.

Community Wellbeing: Strategies and Frameworks for Engagement

The project team designed and implemented the “Community Wellbeing: Strategies and Frameworks for Engagement” training program, convening dozens of community advocates from Artsakh, as well as representatives of community organizations and local government agencies, to widen their perspectives on community wellbeing and enhance their skills for authentic community engagement and supporting Artsakh refugees. Overall, 117 people went through this training.

The training presented a holistic approach to defining and improving community wellbeing, focusing on community engagement and mobilization. A wide range of topics were covered, including the community wellbeing framework, community organizing and engagement, legal aspects of forced displacement, social determinants of health, effective communication, health promotion and education, and trauma-informed programming. The project team engaged local and international experts from Armenia and the United States in the development of the training curricula and implementation of the training, including presentations by faculty and experts from AUA, UCLA, and World Vision.

Various interactive activities and active learning methodologies were implemented throughout the sessions, including group role-plays, problem-solving tasks, case studies, and other relevant exercises. Activities were designed to integrate training techniques with individual lived experiences and to model pedagogical methodologies that foster effective learning, engagement, and collaboration.

Key highlights from the training

- 74% females, 26% males
- The vast majority (76.2%) with university education
- ~91% from Ararat region, ~9% from other regions
- ~25% were forcibly displaced from Artsakh: majority of them moved from Stepanakert, the rest from Martakert and Hadrut.

The training sessions helped the local government and NGO representatives to provide more integrative services to the community members, including Artsakh refugees; the training provided opportunities to Artsakh refugees to enhance their employability providing the necessary skills to be hired by local and national government agencies or organizations providing aid to refugees.

Legal Counselling

To effectively identify and address legal issues, a section on legal needs was incorporated into the home visit assessment form. A detailed guideline was developed for its completion, and training sessions were conducted to ensure proper survey administration while adhering to ethical standards, given the vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries. After a pilot test, the survey form was refined to better suit respondents, making it more informative, concise, and beneficiary-centered.

The comprehensive legal needs assessment conducted through home visits successfully identified the primary legal concerns of refugees. These concerns were categorized by sector, allowing beneficiaries to register for individual or group consultations tailored to their needs. Based on the assessment results, training materials and slide decks were revised in collaboration with experts, consolidating the content into four key thematic areas.

Legal Support

Group consultations were conducted to provide beneficiaries with an overview of relevant legal topics. Four sessions were organized throughout the project, with a total of 60 participants. An additional session was held in collaboration with the NGO "Arpi" in Lori region, engaging 13 refugees and increasing the total number of participants to 73. Each session focused on key topics identified in the needs assessment, such as financial assistance, document restoration, employment record recognition, and pension rights. Beyond these main themes, other legal concerns raised by participants were also addressed. A dedicated segment in each session covered refugee and temporary protection status, along with international migration regulations, to prevent irregular migration and provide accurate legal information.

In addition to group sessions, individual legal consultations were provided to beneficiaries who required personalized support. These consultations were scheduled within 20 working days following each group session, ensuring that beneficiaries had the opportunity to receive tailored legal advice. The individual consultation process included not only group session participants but also other refugees identified during the needs assessment. In total, 86 individual consultations were conducted, during which beneficiaries received comprehensive information on their legal status, civil rights, social security, economic opportunities for them and their family members. Many beneficiaries

were also referred to government agencies, NGOs, and community support systems, which facilitated processes related to documentation, residency regulation, pension access, and social assistance. Overall, 344 individuals benefited from legal advice including individual participants and their household members.

Community Engagement and Social Integration

Both group and individual consultations contributed to beneficiaries' socialization and adaptation to their new environment, fostering community dialogues beyond legal guidance. Discussions and feedback sessions allowed beneficiaries to share their perspectives and contribute proposals and recommendations that informed service improvements. This process enhanced their active participation in their communities and strengthened their ability to navigate legal and administrative systems more effectively and independently.

Development of Livelihood Skills

As part of the legal consultations, guidance on job market preparation, self-employment, and financial literacy was integrated into individual sessions. These efforts supported beneficiaries in achieving greater socio-economic stability. Additionally, legal guidance and assistance with documentation enabled two beneficiaries to successfully register as self-employed. Partner organizations were also engaged to provide further support, ensuring that beneficiaries had access to additional resources and training opportunities.

Ensuring Accessibility and Inclusivity of Services

Legal consultations were designed to be accessible and inclusive, ensuring that beneficiaries with diverse needs and preferences could benefit. Sessions were scheduled flexibly to accommodate varying availability, and a communication channel was maintained between beneficiaries and the legal team to facilitate continuous access to legal services.

Inclusion of Refugee Experts

A key aspect of the program was the engagement of two refugee experts to conduct group and individual consultations. Their high professional qualifications were the primary selection criterion. The involvement of refugee experts significantly enhanced the program's effectiveness by facilitating linguistic and cultural mediation, improving communication, and ensuring that beneficiaries understood their rights and obligations more effectively and with greater trust.

refugees often experience mistrust toward state institutions or public organizations. Having legal experts who shared their lived experiences fostered trust and made beneficiaries more comfortable in seeking legal assistance. Employing refugee professionals also contributed to their economic stability by providing them with income

opportunities. Furthermore, their participation in the program served as a model for resilience, demonstrating that refugees could overcome challenges and rebuild their lives. By incorporating their firsthand knowledge, the program was able to offer more relevant and effective legal support, ensuring that interventions were well-targeted and practical.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The legal counseling program was implemented through multi-level partnerships, enhancing its reach and effectiveness. At the regional level, collaboration with provincial authorities ensured service accessibility, particularly for refugees in rural areas. These authorities also supported awareness-raising efforts. At the local level, strong partnerships were developed with the Masis, Artashat, Ararat, Vedi and Verin Dvin administrations which endorsed the initiative and provided logistical support. Additionally, refugees employed in municipal offices were invited to participate in legal training sessions to enhance their ability to serve their communities.

Collaboration with local institutions further strengthened the program's impact. The Masis Social Support Center provided a dedicated office for individual consultations, ensuring a private and accessible setting. The Masis Passport and Visa Department facilitated expedited processing for individuals applying for or renewing refugee and temporary protection status. The Masis Social Services Department established a coordination system to improve service accessibility, allowing direct referrals between agencies. Local NGOs, volunteer groups, and community leaders played a crucial role in supporting beneficiaries. Community leaders assisted in mapping refugee families, while NGOs provided emergency humanitarian aid, including food, clothing, and other forms of social support.

Through these collaborative efforts, legal counseling services were made more accessible, effective, and responsive to the needs of refugees, contributing to their overall integration and well-being.

First Aid and Basic Life support

As part of the project, a series of First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) workshops were conducted in Ararat region, targeting representatives from various educational institutions, governmental and administrative offices who are working with Artsakh refugees and the local communities. These workshops aimed to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills to respond effectively to emergencies. The sessions were led by a licensed and experienced first aid trainer.

The workshops engaged educators from diverse institutions, including preschools and schools serving both local and refugee communities. In total, over 225 participants

attended the training sessions. Each participant received a CPR brochure and a first-aid kit to ensure they had the necessary resources readily available.

The initiative was well received within the community, with high participation rates and overwhelmingly positive feedback. Participants expressed high satisfaction with the quality of the workshops, highlighting both the excellent organization and the professionalism of the training (See photos from First Aid-CPR workshops in [Appendix 3](#)).

Hairdressing Training Program

As part of its efforts to support professional development and self-reliance, the CWP established a collaboration with the Schwarzkopf Professional hairdressing school. This partnership enabled individuals from Artsakh, currently residing in Ararat region, to enroll in Schwarzkopf Professional's hairdressing course.

The CWP team first identified potential candidates from the community based on insights gathered during home visits. A preliminary selection was made, and shortlisted individuals were subsequently interviewed by the hairdressing school. Those who met the criteria were enrolled in the three-month intensive training program.

The course, which began in August 2024, provided participants with the opportunity to explore their creativity, develop practical skills, and gain access to employment opportunities. Participants received strong training in professional hairdressing techniques. Upon completing the program, the participants were awarded certificates, and received professional equipment sets.

A total of 19 individuals from Artsakh successfully completed the course, five of whom belonged to the CWP target community. Following graduation, CWP has been actively supporting participants in their job search. One graduate has already secured employment with the assistance of the CWP program, while others are actively seeking relevant opportunities.

CWP maintained regular communication with both participants and the hairdressing school throughout the training period. A series of meetings and discussions were organized to monitor progress and explore ways to further develop and expand this initiative.

Entrepreneurial Literacy

An Entrepreneurial Literacy training session was organized for the refugees from Artsakh and covered key topics including business fundamentals, SMART goal setting, marketing strategies, financial planning, and other essential aspects of

entrepreneurship. The training aimed to empower participants with knowledge and skills necessary to develop and successfully implement their business ideas. A total of 15 participants attended the session, all of whom were identified and invited based on the results of home visits conducted by CWWs. In addition, individual consulting sessions took place with 5 individuals.

This initiative provided community members with valuable tools to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape, fostering self-reliance and economic integration.

(See photos from the Entrepreneurial Literacy event in [Appendix 4](#))

Strengthening Community Wellbeing Through Professional Development of Nurses

As part of the Community Wellbeing Project, in collaboration with the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at the AUA Turpanjian College of Health Sciences, a series of continuous professional development (CPD) training sessions were launched for nurses from Artsakh and Ararat region. These sessions aimed to enhance and strengthen nurses' clinical knowledge, skills, and competencies in alignment with the latest evidence-based practices.

To promote self-reliance and foster professional integration, the Community Wellbeing Project provides ongoing education and skills development workshops for various professional groups. In line with this objective, a needs-based training program was developed in collaboration with the BSN program. The curriculum was designed based on a rapid training needs assessment conducted among forcibly displaced nurses from Artsakh. The needs assessment was conducted among about 250 nurse refugees from Artsakh during the project.

The training sessions were accredited by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia, and upon completion, participants received 14 CPD credits.

The training covered a range of critical clinical topics, including:

- Newborn resuscitation care and evidence-based interventions
- Ethical principles in neonatal care decision-making
- Administration of intravenous, intramuscular, and subcutaneous injections
- Recognition and management of post-intravenous catheter placement complications
- Aseptic techniques in medication preparation and administration
- CPR and emergency response procedures

The sessions were conducted by BSN faculty members, international experts in nursing, who developed the training curriculum based on international best practices and evidence-based guidelines. The training included both theoretical and practical components, with participants actively engaging in hands-on practice using mannequins at different nursing stations. This approach facilitated the reinforcement of theoretical knowledge through applied learning.

The sessions were held in the BSN program's practice lab in Yerevan. Additionally, BSN students contributed to the training by moderating practice sessions. Participants' knowledge and skills were assessed using nursing competency checklists and objective-specific clinical examinations.

To date, approximately 65 nurses have successfully completed the training and received continuing nursing education credits from the Ministry of Health. Nurses from Artsakh received CPDs to be able to practice as nurses in Armenia, and nurses from Ararat marz received CPDs to provide better quality care not only to the local population, but also refugees from Artsakh.

The story and photos from some of these events are provided here:

<https://newsroom.aua.am/2024/06/17/strengthening-community-wellbeing-through-professional-development-of-nurses/>

Awareness Raising Event for Nurses from Artsakh

Over 522 refugee nurses from Artsakh were invited to an awareness-raising event focused on enhancing their employability through various training programs. As part of the project, we organized the session to inform them about nursing training opportunities, the BSN program, and English language courses. Some attendees applied and registered for the English classes. These initiatives contribute to improving their livelihood prospects. In total, 108 participants who were interested attended the event.

Connect and Collaborate Stakeholder Meeting

As part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen collaboration and enhance community development, we organized a working meeting in Masis with representatives from 14 local and international organizations operating in the region. The meeting aimed to facilitate cooperation, identify key challenges and resources within Ararat Marz, and explore potential solutions through joint initiatives.

During the discussion, participants shared their experiences, highlighted ongoing programs, and proposed new ideas for collaboration, reinforcing both existing partnerships and fostering new connections. The engagement and exchange of ideas

laid the groundwork for future coordinated efforts to address community needs effectively (See photos from the stakeholder meeting event in [Appendix 5](#)).

Social and Health Campaigns

As part of the program, health and social awareness campaigns were conducted to promote a healthy lifestyle and encourage appropriate behaviors. The awareness campaign focused on three main areas:

- **Community events and home visits** – Implemented through local CWWs via direct meetings, discussions, and distribution of informational materials (reached ~9000 individuals).
- **Direct engagement with administrative structures** – Facilitating collaboration and information-sharing (reached ~390 individuals).
- **Social media campaign** – A large-scale digital campaign was launched on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) to ensure direct communication with the target groups (reached ~30,000 individuals)

Two major community level campaigns were implemented, focusing on social-cultural education and health promotion, specifically targeting eye health. These initiatives aimed to foster community engagement, social cohesion, and preventive healthcare awareness. The key highlights of these campaigns are summarized below.

CWP and Pilibos: A Social-Cultural Campaign

In September 2024, the CWP, in collaboration with the Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School from Los Angeles, organized a social-cultural campaign in Masis community. This initiative brought together youth representatives and high school students from Masis, Artsakh refugees residing in Masis, and students from the Pilibos Armenian School. The campaign provided a platform for students to engage with one another through social, artistic, and sports activities, fostering connections between Armenian youth across different regions.

As part of the campaign, Pilibos students visited families in need in the village of Darbnik, identified through home visits conducted by the CWP team. The students generously donated heaters and mixers to the residents of the dormitory. Additionally, they participated in a friendly soccer match with players from Armen Nazaryan Sports School and Pyunik Football Club, visited St. Thaddeus Church, and learned traditional Armenian dances with the Lernapar Song and Dance Ensemble.

Through these activities, students had the opportunity to converse, connect, and share their experiences with local youth from Masis and the youth refugees from Artsakh. This initiative not only facilitated meaningful cross-community engagement but also reinforced the CWP's mission of promoting social cohesion and integration through cultural exchange and shared experiences.

Eye Health Campaign: Preventing Visual Impairment

In collaboration with the Garo Meghriyan Institute for Preventive Ophthalmology (Meghriyan Institute), the CWP organized a community-wide eye health campaign in celebration of World Sight Day 2024. World Sight Day, observed annually on the second Thursday of October, is a global awareness initiative emphasizing the importance of eye health and vision care. The theme for 2024, "Children, love your eyes," underscored the vital role of good vision in a child's development and well-being. Through this campaign, the CWP successfully contributed to raising awareness and providing tangible solutions to improve eye health outcomes in the forcibly displaced Artsakh community.

As part of the campaign, the project team developed and distributed educational materials on healthy eye care practices for children and their parents. These materials included recommendations and practical tips to promote long-term eye health and prevent common vision problems. By instilling good eye care habits early, the program aimed to empower children to take an active role in maintaining their vision throughout their lives.

Parents and caregivers also received guidance on how to prevent eye health issues and support their child's vision development, reinforcing the campaign's goal of preventive eye care awareness.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The CWP employed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to systematically assess program effectiveness, measure impact, and guide continuous improvements. This framework combined qualitative and quantitative methods, including baseline and follow-up surveys to evaluate training effectiveness, qualitative and observational assessments to capture real-time program dynamics. Additionally, community feedback sessions were integrated to ensure beneficiary voices informed program refinements. Regular analysis of evaluation findings enabled CWP to identify strengths, address gaps, and adapt interventions to better meet the evolving needs of the displaced population. This iterative, data-driven approach ensured that the project

remained responsive, impactful, and aligned with its overarching goals of improving community well-being.

Sustaining Program Impact and Engagement

A key lesson learned was the need for long-term sustainability in community-based programs. While CWP successfully facilitated capacity-building and integration initiatives, ensuring that refugees could maintain and expand these efforts beyond the project's timeline remained a challenge. Establishing self-sustaining networks and strengthening institutional support were identified as critical factors for long-term impact. As promised, our activities extended beyond Ararat region, engaging participants from other regions as well. Furthermore, our initiatives continue even beyond the completion of the CWP, thanks to our ongoing collaboration with the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and the matching funds. This partnership ensures the sustainability of our efforts, allowing us to expand the impact and reach to more communities in need.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges identified, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of future interventions:

1. Streamline Legal and Administrative Support

- Advocate for simplified and expedited legal procedures for refugees, reducing administrative delays and burdensome bureaucratic steps.
- Establish a legal aid fund or pro bono legal assistance network to support refugees in navigating documentation and rights-related processes.
- Strengthen collaboration with relevant government institutions to introduce standardized procedures for refugees.

2. Improve Service Coordination and Accessibility

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive online resource hub that consolidates information on available services, eligibility criteria, and application procedures.
- Increase outreach efforts to ensure that refugees are aware of and can access healthcare, social support, and employment services.
- Enhance inter-agency coordination among government bodies, NGOs, and community organizations to reduce service duplication and improve targeted assistance.

3. Address Housing and Economic Stability

- Advocate for long-term housing solutions, such as subsidized housing programs, vocational training for refugees in the construction sector, and rent assistance initiatives.
- Develop livelihood programs, including vocational training, microfinance opportunities, and small business grants, to support refugees in achieving economic independence.

4. Strengthen Health and Mental Health Services

- Expand mental health awareness campaigns to address stigma and encourage refugees to seek psychosocial support.
- Increase access to free or low-cost mental health services, including telemedicine options for remote areas.
- Partner with local and international health organizations to provide specialized medical care, including dental and ophthalmic services, not covered under basic benefit programs.

5. Foster Long-Term Community Resilience

- Encourage peer-led community initiatives where refugees take active roles in organizing social, economic, and cultural activities.
- Support the creation of self-sustaining community groups focused on education, employment, and social integration, fostering independence beyond project funding cycles.
- Promote policy-level advocacy to institutionalize the Community Wellbeing Worker (CWW) model as a formalized part of community health and social services.

Conclusion

The CWP successfully provided critical support to refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, addressing their immediate needs while fostering long-term resilience and integration. Through targeted interventions in community engagement, service accessibility, legal and social support, healthcare, and economic empowerment, the project has contributed to strengthening self-reliance and improving the well-being of affected individuals.

The integration of refugee professionals into the project team, the development of structured training programs, and the creation of collaborative partnerships were pivotal to ensuring the project's success. Furthermore, the project played a key role in

addressing systemic challenges, including legal barriers, service accessibility issues, and economic instability among refugees.

Overall Reach:

Through its multifaceted interventions, the CWP directly touched the lives of about 10,000 individuals, empowering refugees with the tools, resources, and support needed to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities. The project’s success underscores the importance of community-driven initiatives in fostering resilience and long-term well-being. We have also indirectly but positively influenced the lives of all Artsakh refugees living in Ararat region through enhancing the capacity of local government and NGO officials, teachers, and nurses who serve the needs of refugee and local populations fostering resilience and integration (at the beginning of the forced displacement in 2023, approximately 19,000 refugees from Artsakh resided in Ararat⁵, but due to internal and external migration, this number decreased to about 12,000⁶).

While the project achieved significant impact, the findings highlight the urgent need for continued efforts in addressing housing insecurity, employment challenges, and access to mental health support. Strengthening multi-stakeholder coordination, investing in long-term capacity-building, and advocating for policy changes will be essential in ensuring that refugees can transition towards sustainable livelihood and community integration.

Moving forward, it is crucial to expand partnerships, leverage technology for service coordination, and promote economic opportunities to empower refugee/ forcibly displaced people. By implementing the recommended strategies, future initiatives can build upon the foundation established by the CWP, ensuring lasting impact and resilience for refugee communities in Armenia and beyond. It is important to emphasize that the project team will continue its work in Ararat and in other regions using matching funds, further expanding its reach and impact.

⁵ Helix Consulting LLC, “99.2 Percent of Forcibly Displaced Persons from Nagorno Karabakh Have Been Registered,” accessed April 2, 2025, <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/10388/>.

⁶ “UNICEF Armenia Humanitarian Situation Report No. 16, 01 June - 31 August 2024 - Armenia | ReliefWeb.”

Appendix 1

Home Visits



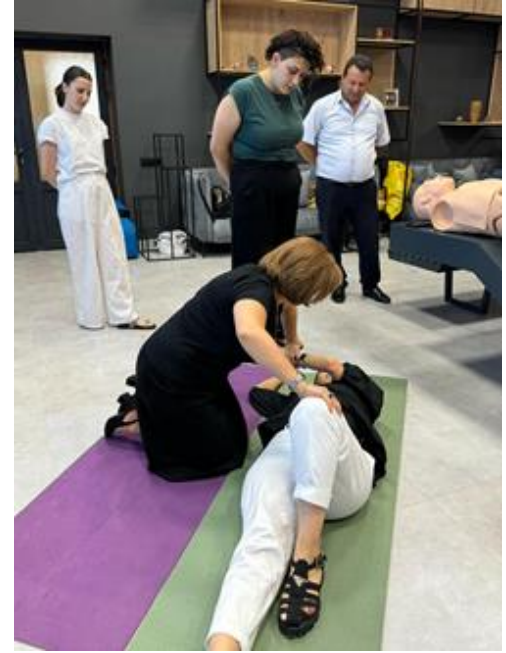
Appendix 2

Legal Counseling



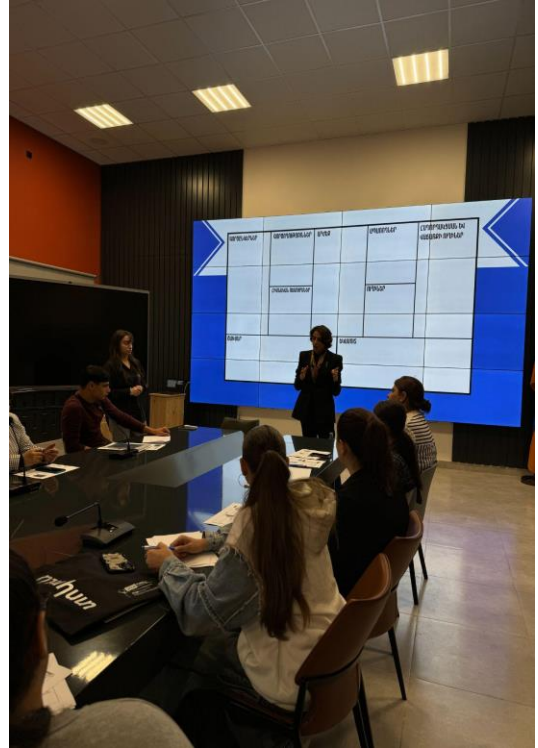
Appendix 3

First Aid-CPR Workshops



Appendix 4

Entrepreneurial Literacy



Appendix 5

Stakeholder Meeting

