



Rapid Needs Assessment



Photo credit: CARE Caucasus

Priorities and needs of the displaced population from Nagorno-Karabakh

5 October, 2023

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
STATEMENT OF INTENT.....	4
OVERALL OBJECTIVE.....	4
METHODOLOGY.....	4
LIMITATION.....	4
KEY FINDINGS.....	5
PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS.....	5
FAMILY COMPOSITION.....	5
MOVEMENT AND LOCATIONS.....	6
PRIORITY NEEDS.....	7
NUTRITION AND FOOD.....	8
FINANCIAL STABILITY.....	10
PROTECTION RISKS.....	10
ACCESS TO INFORMATION.....	11
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	12
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS:.....	12

INTRODUCTION

The military action launched by Azerbaijan on September 19th prompted a mass exodus of the ethnic Armenian population from Nagorno-Karabakh. As of October 3, 16:00 100,625 persons fled¹ to Armenia, a landlocked country of just 2.7 mil. people, with challenging political and economic situation. The crisis will have long-lasting impact on the country's socio-economic setting and affect the government, society and, most importantly the lives of displaced population.

The mass displacement of the population came after by long-term tensions in the region and the blockade of the Lachin corridor, imposed by Azerbaijan in December 2022. The 9 months-long blockade of the Lachin corridor, the only pathway connecting Nagorno-Karabakh territory to Armenia, effectively cut off supplies of essential goods and necessities for the Nagorno-Karabakh population. The 120,000 residents of Nagorno-Karabakh experienced a significant scarcity of food and essential items, medical supplies and services. As the population left their territories, they went through long queues for evacuation and spent several days on the roads to the Armenian border. Majority of the displaced are women, children, elderly. Families are traveling with multiple children.

While Syunik region is the first stop for the displaced, the majority of them are moving and heading to other regions of Armenia. They mostly reside with the host families or collective shelters (state buildings) and/or hotels, that are not well adapted for long-term stays. As of October 1, according to the official figures, 48,649 persons were provided temporary accommodation by the state.²

The Government of Armenia is coordinating humanitarian assistance for the displaced population. Recently, the government has announced cash support programs, which includes one-time cash assistance of 100,000 Armenian dram, and cash for utility and rent of 40,000 and 10,000 Armenian Dram per person respectively.³

International and local organizations and civil society are making efforts to mobilize resources. Multiagency coordination groups have been set up in the cash assistance and shelter sectors. Local organizations have taken action to provide basic shelter, food and hygiene and winterization items. Despite the existing support, it can be difficult for them to mobilize all necessary resources to accommodate the newly arrived populations over the next weeks, as the needs grow, with upcoming winter conditions and limited coping mechanisms.

Additional external assistance is crucial for addressing both the immediate and mid-term needs of the affected people to provide access to education, protection, and other essential services. Effective response strategies require coordinated efforts among international donors, organizations, government bodies, and private agencies.

¹ See more here: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1121102/>

² The number of displaced persons provided accommodation in different regions: in Ararat – 12445 persons, Kotayk – 11630, Syunik – 4592, Armavir – 4461, Gegharqunik- 3996, Lori – 2686, Tavush – 2322, Aragatsotn – 2305, Shirak – 2275, Vayots Dzor – 1937. Available here: <https://armtimes.com/hy/article/270493>

³ See more: <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/10370/>

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The rapid needs assessment aims to understand the priority needs and barriers that displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh are facing in Armenia. This rapid assessment will help CARE Caucasus, "WINNET Goris" Development Foundation and partner organizations design and plan humanitarian response strategy for displaced populations in Armenia before more comprehensive data is collected and analyzed. The findings will be further disseminated with civil society representatives, UN-led working groups, government agencies, which are planning to provide assistance to the displaced population from Nagorno-Karabakh. CARE Caucasus aims to ensure that adequate humanitarian support is provided to people in need, especially the most vulnerable groups such as women, children, elderly and people with disabilities.

Overall Objective

The objective of the rapid assessment is to identify the immediate needs of the affected population and help CARE and partners provide response, which will meet the needs and priorities of the displaced population.

The specific objectives of this assessment are:

- Understand the prioritized needs of the conflict-affected population;
- Understand what their vulnerabilities are and how they might be addressed;
- Understand the current settlement of displaced persons, as well as their intentions for future movement;
- Understand their security and dignity concerns;
- and identify the type of information they would like to receive in Armenia.

Methodology

The Rapid Need Assessment questionnaire was prepared on 26th of September, 2023. The data was collected in Sep 26-29, 2023. 16 close-ended questions were included under the 5 major sections: a) about respondents and household composition; b) needs; c) security and protection; d) movement and current settlement e) access to information and services.

The online survey was created using Google Forms and WINNET Goris Development Foundation team members and volunteers filled in the survey by interviewing respondents at temporary shelters and registration centers in Goris. The convenience sampling is considered the most optimal method of assessments.

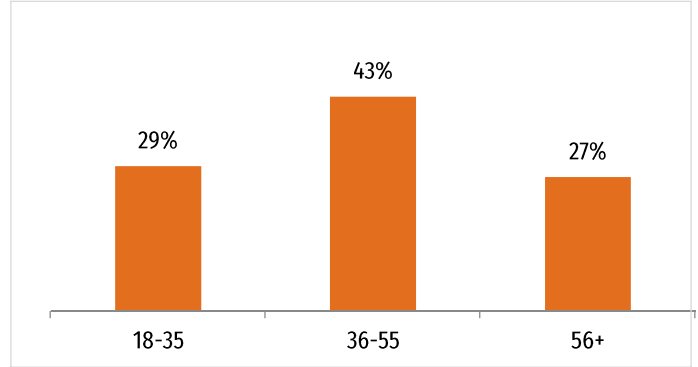
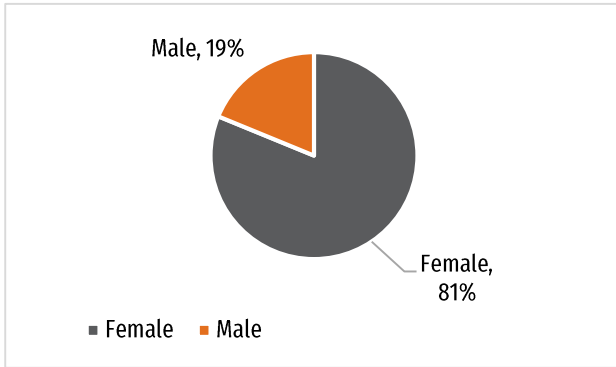
Limitation

The small sample and survey methods used have limitations in terms of the representativeness and disaggregation of this data.

KEY FINDINGS

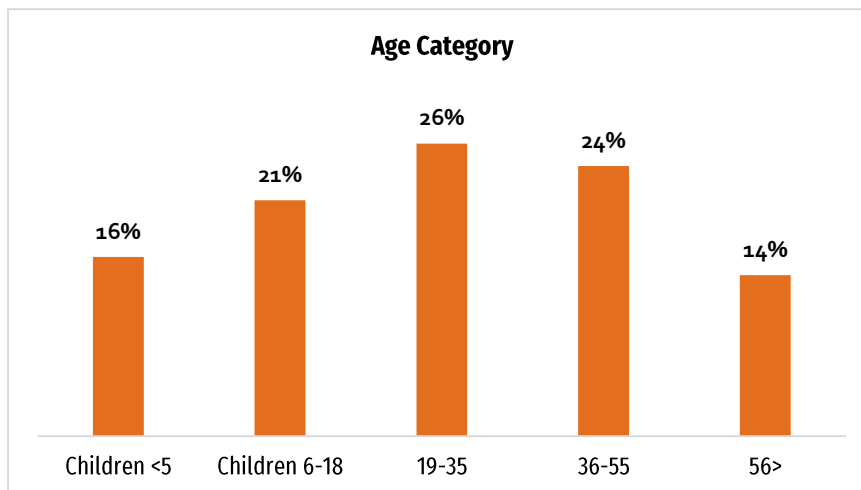
Profile of respondents

The vast majority (81%) of survey respondents are female and 19 % are male. The average age of respondents is 47.3, 43% of the respondents are between 36-55 age group, while 29% of interviewed people are in the 18-35 age group and 27% are 56 or more years old.



Family composition

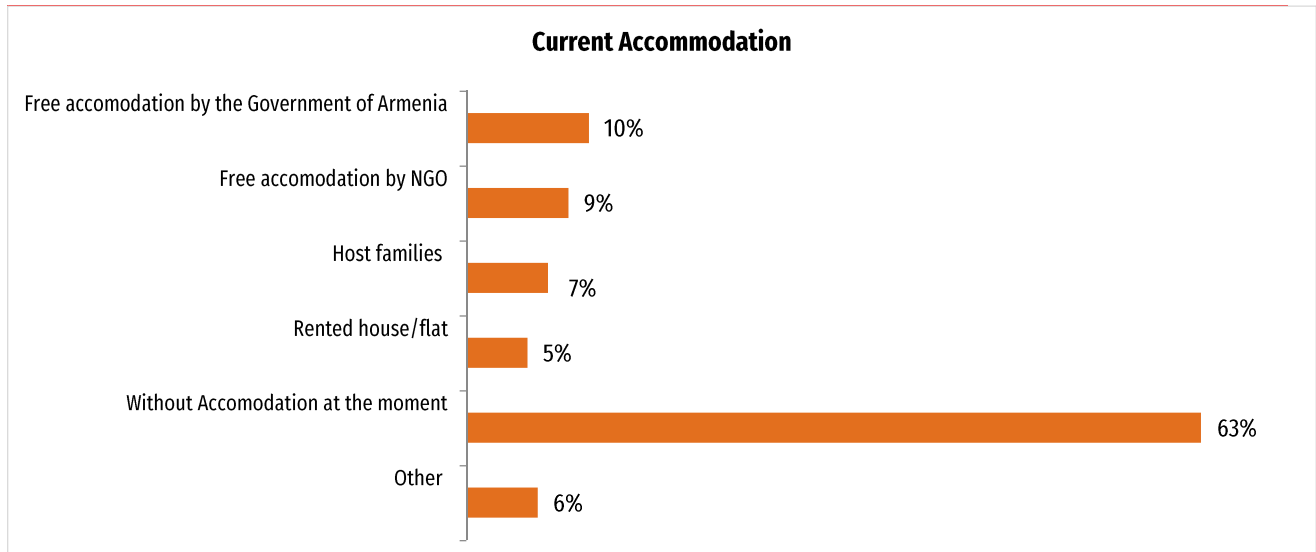
120 HH took part in the interview process including 606 family members. Average size of a displaced family in Armenia is 5.1. The table below summarizes the age category of family members arrived in Armenia. Out of 606 people, 16% are children less than 5 years of age, 21% are children aged between 6-18, 49% are adults (19-56) and 14% are people aged 56 or more.



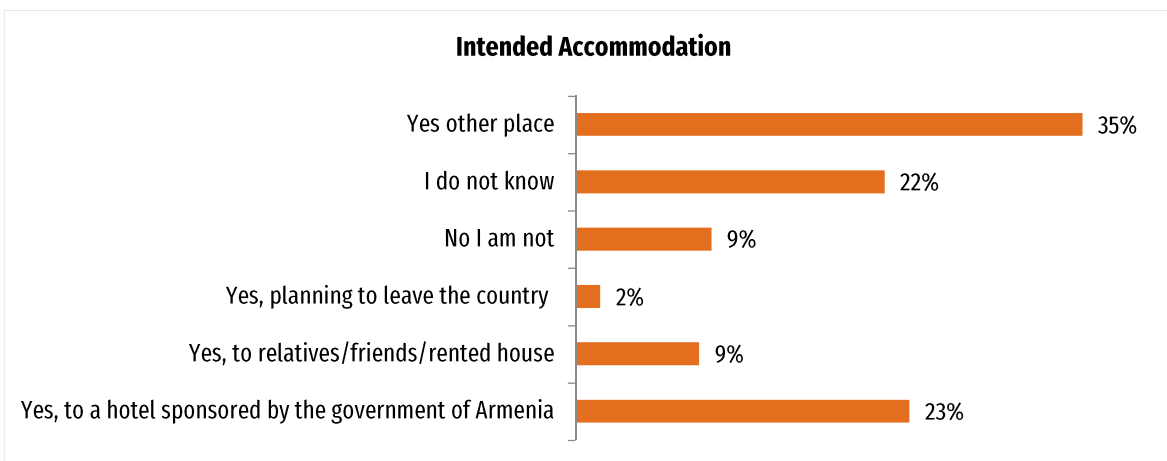
A specific vulnerable category survey identified are pregnant or breastfeeding women (n=16) 3% and people with disabilities (n=26) 4%. It is important to note that the local NGOs with past experience of working with displaced population mentioned that families are characterized by larger size and multiple children.

Movement and Locations

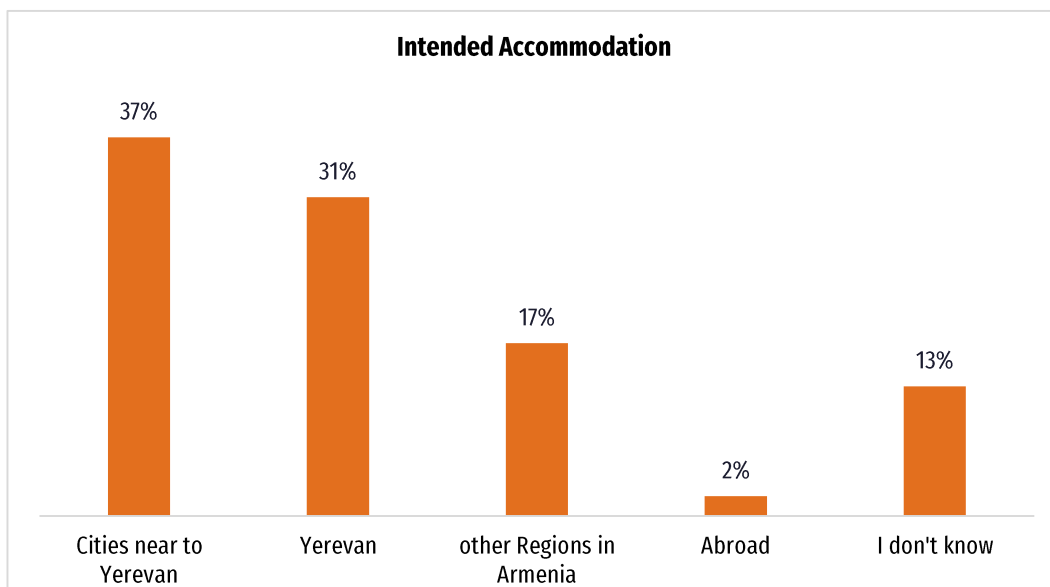
When survey participants were asked about their current accommodation, the responses were as follows: 63% of respondents indicated that they currently do not have accommodation or have nowhere to go. 7% reported staying with host families, which includes relatives, acquaintances, or friends. 5% mentioned residing in a rented house or flat. 9% of the respondents stated that they are staying in a place provided by an NGO free of charge. 10% mentioned utilizing accommodation in hotels or rented flats funded by the government of Armenia.



During the survey the respondents were asked if their family intended to stay in the location they currently were, to move on to another location, or to leave country in the next month. A significant portion of respondents (35%) plan to move to another place within one month. 23% of respondents plan to move to a government hotel. 9% intend to move to relatives' or friends' places or a rented house. 9% do not plan to move, while 22% are uncertain about their plans.



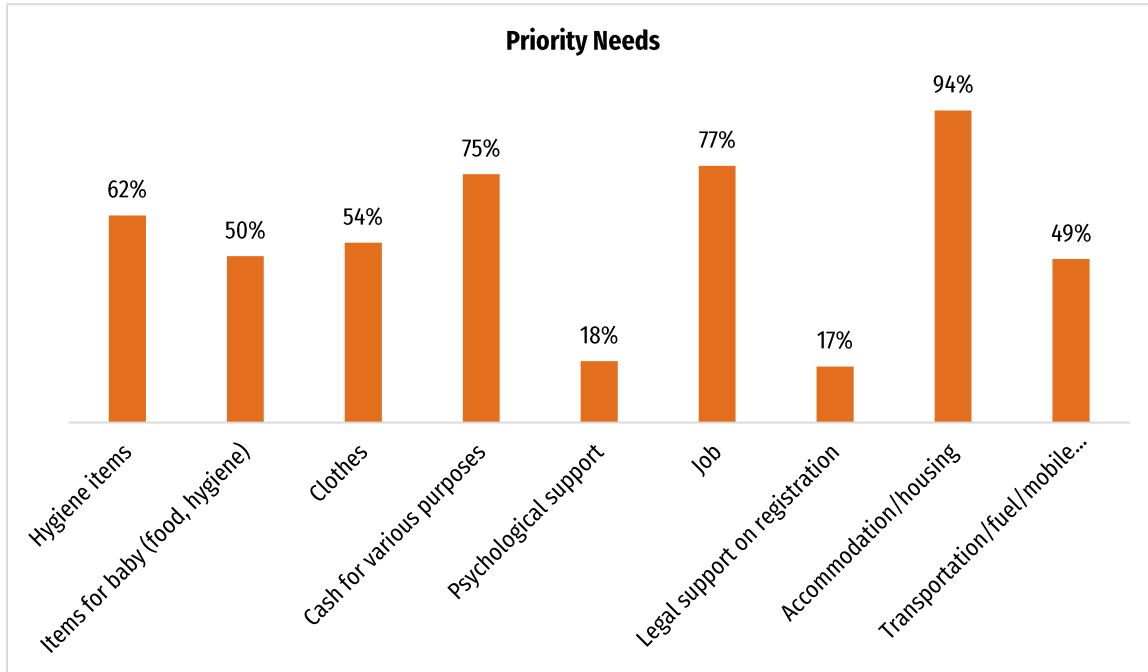
When it comes to their preferred locations for staying, the survey participants' choices were as follows: A significant majority (38.6%) expressed a preference for staying in nearby cities rather than Yerevan. 26.6% want/plan to stay in Yerevan. A smaller portion (5%) planned to reside in Goris. Another 14% plans to stay in other regions of Armenia. Lastly, 13% of respondents were uncertain about their intended location for accommodation other regions within Armenia. Lastly, 13% of respondents were uncertain about their intended location for accommodation.



Priority Needs

Respondents were asked to choose their three top priority needs from a list. In the first rank priority, accommodation is the most often indicated answer. 94% of respondents identifying accommodation/housing as a priority, hence, securing housing is the most critical need. Employment is the second highest priority, with 77% of respondents expressing a need for job opportunities. Cash for Various Purposes: many respondents require financial assistance for various purposes, with 75% indicating this as a top priority.

It worth to mention that ensuring access to food is a critical priority, with 68% of respondents identifying it as a pressing need. Access to hygiene items is also a significant concern, with 62% of respondents indicating this as a priority. Obtaining clothing is a need for 54% of respondents. Items for Baby (Food, Hygiene): Supporting infants and young children with baby items such as food and hygiene products is important to 50% of respondents. Transportation/Fuel/Mobile Connection: Ensuring transportation and connectivity is a priority for 49% of respondents.



Based on interviews conducted with local NGOs, it is evident that food remains a serious concern for displaced individuals and families. While food packages or food items were distributed at registration points, their availability was sporadic and left many families with inadequate supplies. The protracted waiting times at collective centers and registration points, exacerbated by long queues for newly arrived individuals, further intensified this issue.

Notably, the demand for baby food is particularly acute and requires immediate attention. Additionally, hygiene and sanitation items are of paramount importance, given the prolonged periods that displaced populations have spent on the road without access to basic facilities. Women's hygiene, including sanitary pads, is an unmet necessity and a prominent request among local NGOs. Simultaneously, the provision of baby diapers is essential.

With winter approaching and many displaced individuals having left their homes with minimal possessions, there is an urgent need for winterization kits encompassing warm clothing and blankets. Local NGOs emphasize the necessity of swift action to provide winterization support in light of the impending winter conditions.

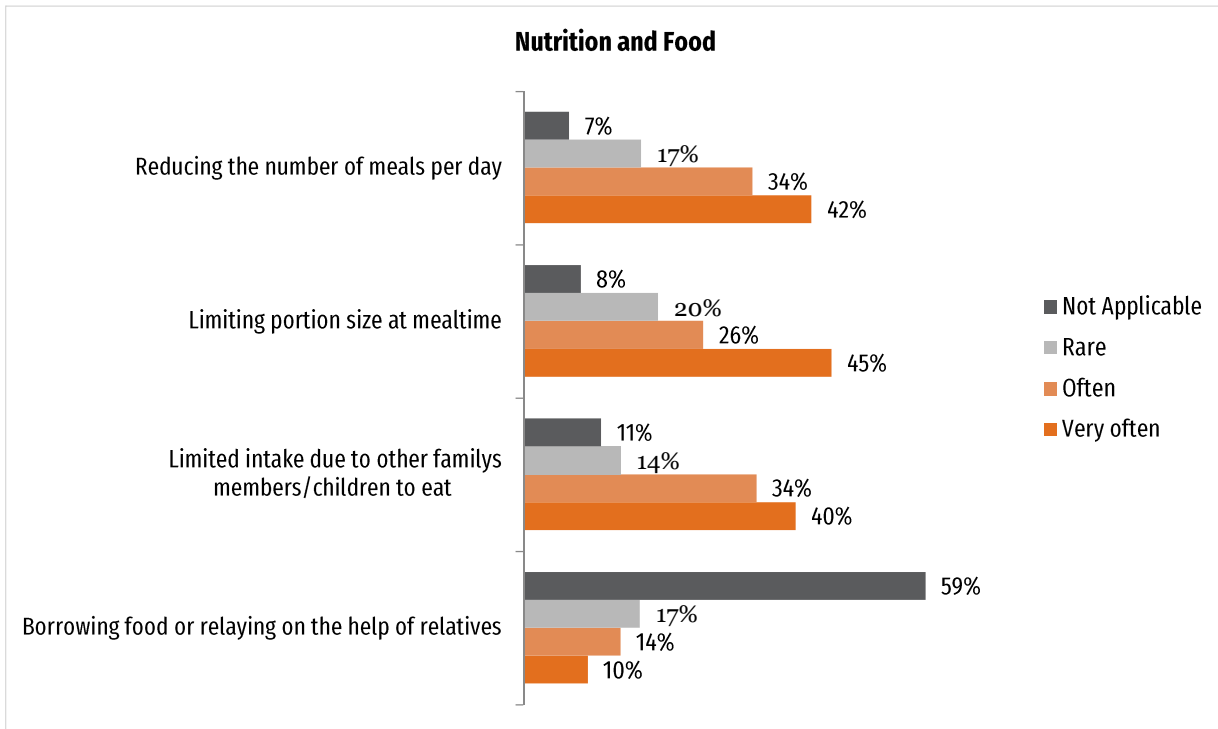
Nutrition and Food

The survey also intended to provide some insight into vulnerability and access to food for the people in Nagorno-Karabagh prior to the displacement. Therefore, the survey participants were asked questions about their access to/intake of food in the last 7 days and in the last 3 months.

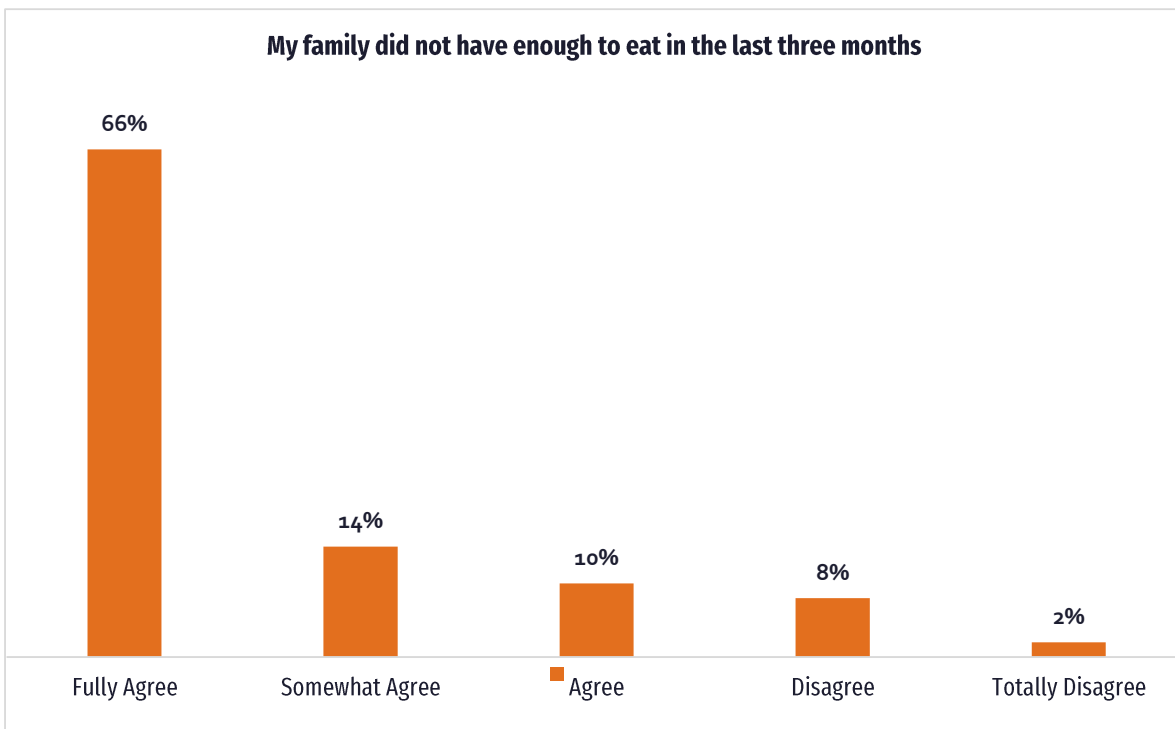
Borrowing food or relying on relatives had a significant "Not Applicable" percentage (59%), but for those who had to do it, it was typically done "Rarely" or "Often. Limited intake due to other family members/children

RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

eating was quite common, with 40% reporting "Very Often. Limiting portion size at mealtime was reported by a substantial number, with 45% doing it "Very Often. Reducing the number of meals per day was also relatively common, with 42% reporting "Very Often." These findings highlight the food-related challenges faced by the surveyed individuals, including limited access to preferred or expensive food and the need to make adjustments in portion sizes and meal frequency.

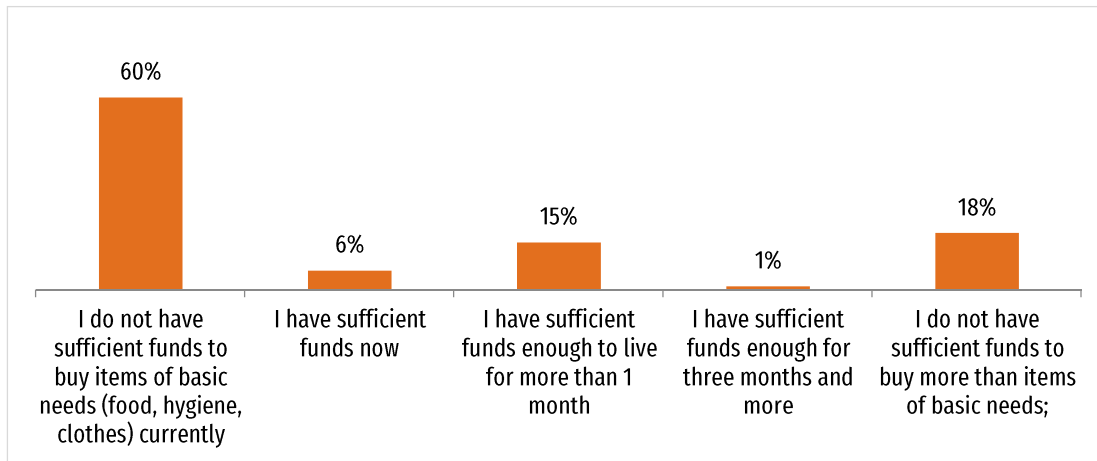


Food insecurity has been a concern for the participants even before they fled Nagorno-Karabkh. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: "My family did not have enough to eat in the last three months". Significant proportion of the participants (66%) fully agreed, 14% somewhat agreed and 10% of the displaced agreed with this statement.



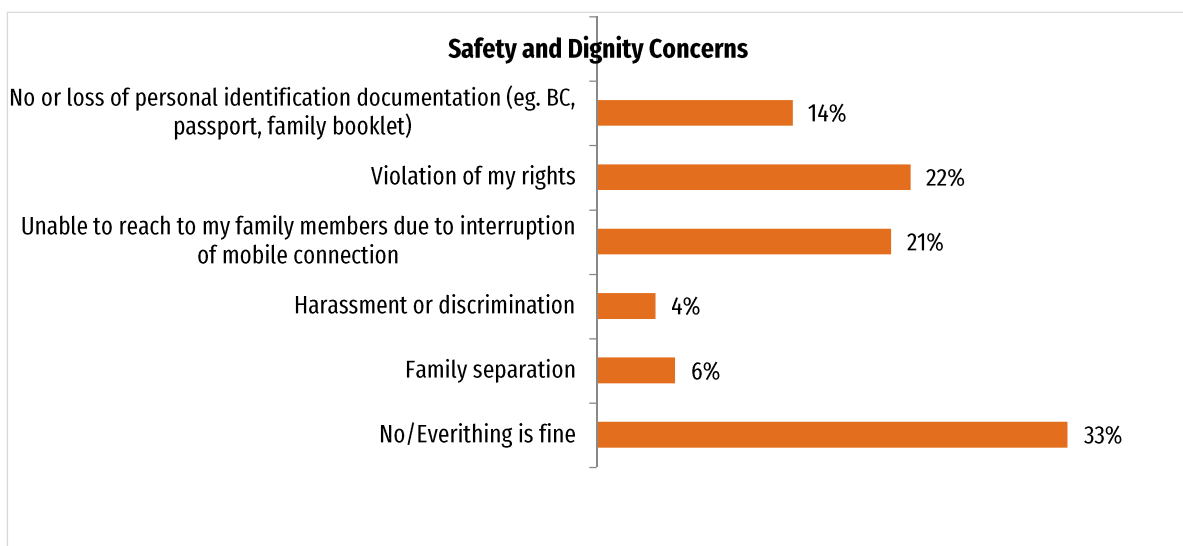
Financial Stability

Respondents also were asked about their financial stability. The majority of respondents (60%) expressed that they currently do not have sufficient funds to buy essential items like food, hygiene products, and clothing. A smaller percentage (6%) stated that they have enough funds at the moment. Some respondents (15%) reported having enough funds to sustain themselves for one month, and a very small percentage (1%) indicated that they have savings to cover expenses for three months or more. Another notable group (18%) mentioned having enough for basic needs but not for additional expenses.



Protection risks

Approximately one-third of the respondents reported that they are not currently facing any significant safety or dignity issues. The most frequently mentioned concerns include violations of rights (22%), the inability to reach family members due to mobile connection interruptions (21%), and the loss or absence of personal identification documentation (14%). These issues appear to be prevalent among the respondents. While less common, family separation (6%) and harassment or discrimination (4%) were still reported by some respondents, indicating that these are less frequent but impactful issues affecting a portion of the surveyed population.

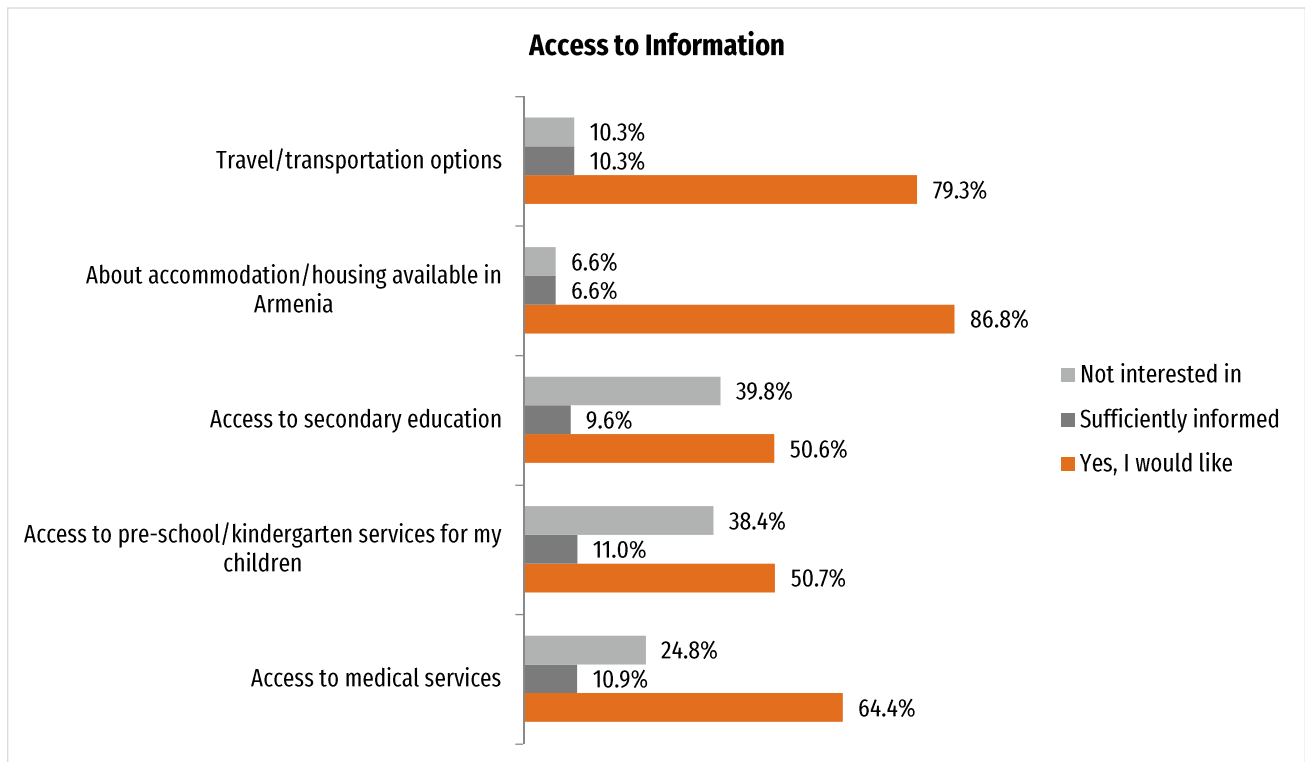


Protection concerns need to be considered to ensure safety and dignity of the population, particularly of women, girls, children, elderly who constitute majority of the displaced. While at early stage of displacement, basic needs prevail the protection issue, dignity and safety concerns need to be integrated in the response from early on. This was confirmed by CARE Caucasus consultations with local organizations working on women and children protection issues. Displacement after the 2020 war showed that domestic violence is a prevalent issue in Nagorno-Karabakh. There were not any domestic violence shelters or centers in the region, there's low awareness about the issue and violence is often normalized:

“only a few months after we began disseminating information about the violence, we received direct referrals.”(NGO Women Support Center).

Access to information

The chart below provides the information on needs and interests of the surveyed population. The topics that generated the highest interest in receiving additional information were about “Accommodation/Housing Available in Armenia” (87%) and “Access to Medical Services” (64%). These topics appear to be of utmost importance to the surveyed individuals. “Access to Pre-school/Kindergarten Services for My Children,” “Access to Secondary Education,” and “Travel/Transportation Options” all had moderate interest levels. While not as high as the top two topics, they still garnered notable interest from the respondents. Overall, the survey indicated a significant desire for more information on various topics. A substantial portion of the respondents expressed interest in obtaining additional information. Relatively small percentages of respondents reported feeling sufficiently informed or not interested. This suggests that there is generally a need for more information among the surveyed individuals.



CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings underscore the immediate needs of the displaced community, emphasizing the necessity of comprehensive support that addresses not only housing and employment but also financial stability. It is evident that access to food, hygiene items, clothing, and support for infants and young children remain crucial concerns, emphasizing the need for holistic humanitarian assistance.

The assessment findings shed light on the significant food-related challenges experienced by the surveyed individuals and underscore the pressing need for targeted interventions to address food insecurity and ensure that displaced individuals have consistent access to nutritious and sufficient meals. Such efforts are essential not only for meeting immediate nutritional requirements but also for safeguarding the overall well-being and health of the displaced population.

Financial Stability: A significant majority of respondents (60%) lack the necessary funds to procure essential items, highlighting the urgent requirement for financial assistance. Financial stability goes beyond economic well-being; it is a pivotal element in bolstering the overall resilience, dignity, and empowerment of displaced individuals.

Protection concerns, especially those affecting women, girls, children, and the elderly, require immediate attention. It is imperative that dignity and safety considerations are fully integrated into the humanitarian response. This includes addressing issues like violations of rights, disruptions in mobile connectivity, and the loss of personal identification documentation. Information on legal rights and available support can empower displaced persons to navigate the complex processes of registering with authorities or accessing essential services.

Access to Information: Respondents expressed a strong desire for more information, particularly regarding accommodation/housing availability (87%) and access to medical services (64%). Ensuring access to accurate information is crucial for informed decision-making, it empowers displaced persons to make informed choices, protect themselves and their families, and actively engage in their own recovery and resilience-building efforts.

Recommendations for Humanitarian Actors:

Accommodation: Support transitional housing facilities and support services to meet critical criteria for safety, privacy and dignity of people during displacement. These facilities can offer temporary accommodation and assistance to those without shelter, with a particular emphasis on families and vulnerable individuals. Furthermore, a comprehensive information campaign should be initiated to inform displaced persons about the availability and benefits of these transitional housing options, while also addressing any uncertainties they may have about their intended accommodation locations.

Food and NFI: Deliver targeted assistance programs on food, hygiene and winterization in order to address the basic needs of the displaced population, with the upcoming winter in mind. In food programs, prioritize households with children and those reporting frequent limitations in portion sizes and meal frequency, aiming to alleviate food insecurity and improve overall nutritional well-being. In the distribution of NFI items, the specific needs of women, children, elderly and other vulnerable groups should be considered.

Cash Assistance: Implement various modalities of cash assistance programs to meet various financial needs identified by respondents, including securing accommodation, accessing employment opportunities, and covering other essential expenses

Protection: Work with the authorities to provide better guidance and support for effective prevention, protection and safeguarding measures, especially for women and children; Ensure that girls, women, and people of all genders are aware of the risks of violence and sexual harassment, are informed of how to access

measures. Work with the government to ensure that the hotline providers have relevant language skills; Within communities, continually update and share GBV services and referral pathways, especially girls and women;

Access to Information: Develop communication strategies to provide information on accommodation options, medical services, and other essential topics to the displaced population. Ensure information is easily accessible and well-distributed. Engage with local NGOs, host communities to disseminate information.

Community Engagement: Involve affected communities in decision-making processes and seek their input to tailor assistance to their specific needs.

Coordination: Strengthen coordination among NGOs, government agencies, and humanitarian actors to ensure a cohesive and effective response to the displacement crisis in Armenia.

Build resilience: Recognize and assess the capacity, resources and responsibilities of the displaced and host population in addressing the needs of the displaced population and address their vulnerabilities. For the mid-term, plan and execute socio-economic integration activities on employment (self-employment), social inclusion, sustainable housing and other areas, focusing on the diverse needs of population particularly of youth and women.

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