



# Armenia Emergency Six-Month Impact Report

SEPTEMBER 2023 - MARCH 2024

# UNHCR's response to the Armenia Emergency

## KEY FIGURES

### Affected population



**115,243** refugees

have been registered in Armenia as of March 2024



**52 per cent** are women



**31 per cent** are children



**14 per cent** are older people

This refugee population is more than 4 per cent of Armenia's population.

### UNHCR's response

UNHCR with partners distributed **115,747 core relief items**, benefitting **12,433 households** (51,221 people).



UNHCR has responded to **6,538 hotline calls**, providing critical information on where to receive support and on refugees' legal rights.

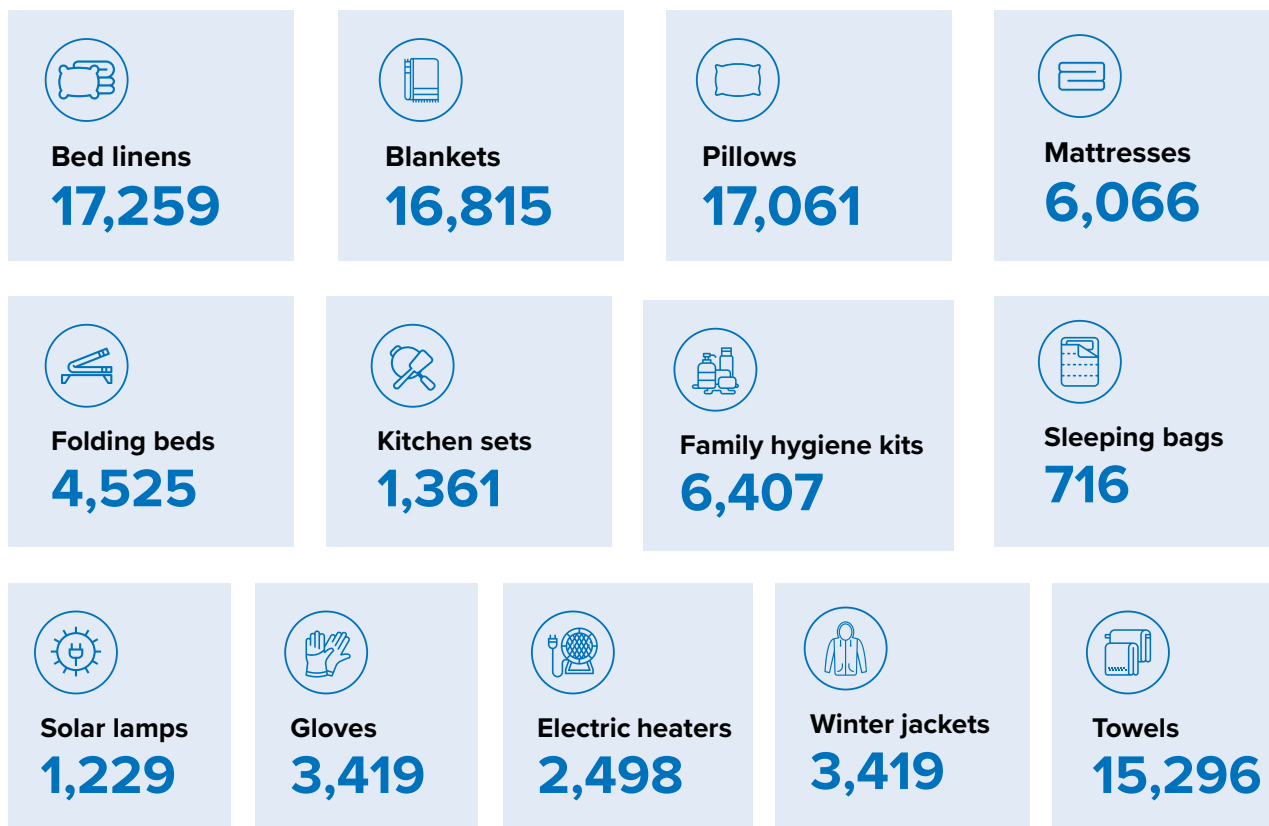


UNHCR has visited **2,516 refugee households** (11,618 individuals) in 10 provinces and Yerevan to understand their protection concerns and inform targeted assistance.



UNHCR has provided monthly cash assistance of \$125 per person, targeting **5,500 of the most vulnerable refugees**, covering 6 months.

## Items distributed:



## Financial requirements

A total of \$97 million was requested by UNHCR and partners for the inter-agency [Armenia Refugee Response Plan](#). As of 29 March 2024, the inter-agency appeal is 51 per cent funded. UNHCR's specific appeal amounts to \$14.6 million.

# Humanitarian context

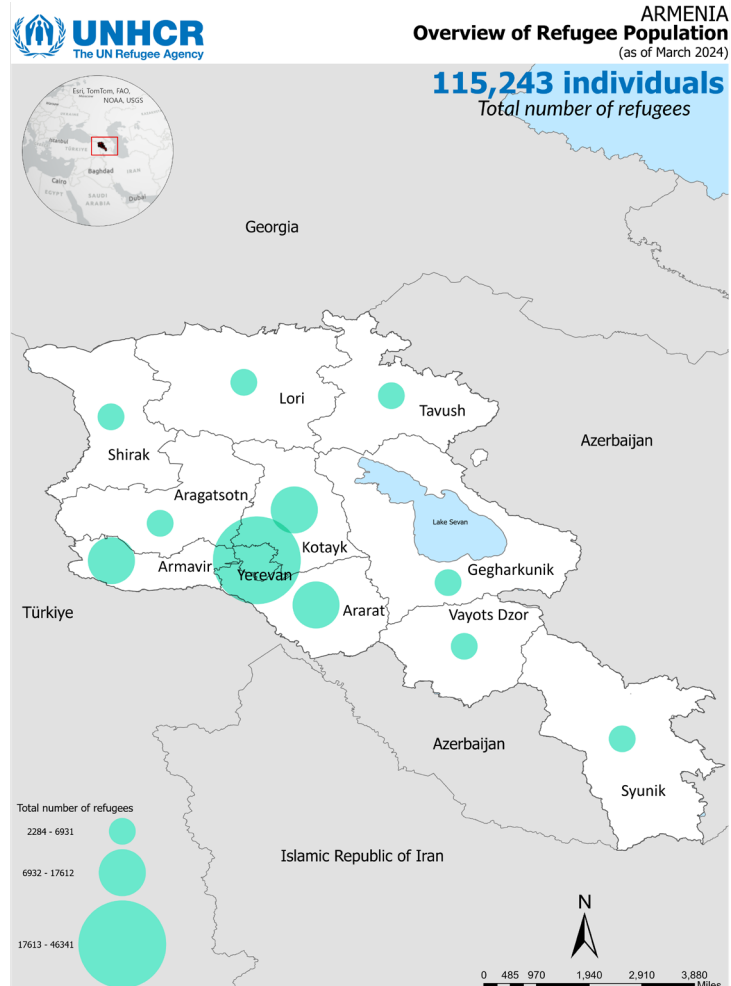
In the last week of September 2023, following renewed hostilities in the South Caucasus region, refugees began arriving rapidly in Armenia. In a short time, **over 115,000 refugees had crossed the border**. They arrived in urgent need of protection and support. Among new arrivals, some 30,000 are children and many vulnerable people including pregnant women, people with disabilities and others with chronic health conditions.

Most refugees who arrived in Armenia fled with little to no personal belongings amid freezing temperatures. Many new arrivals have been hosted in remote areas and faced the added challenge of coping with harsh winter conditions. Refugees have been living in hotels, hostels, schools, and other temporary shelters, or with family and friends, often in crowded conditions.

UNHCR teams have been on the ground and at the border since the earliest days, when the first groups of refugees arrived. **Building on its solid presence in the country since 1992**, as well as partnerships with the Government of Armenia, non-governmental organizations, and refugee-led and community-based organizations, UNHCR provided immediate humanitarian assistance and protection services, closely monitoring the situation in support of the government-led response.

As the number of arrivals has stabilized and many of the most urgent life-saving humanitarian needs

were addressed, focus continues on meeting their residual humanitarian needs and medium and longer-term needs including legal documentation, stable accommodation, employment opportunities and inclusion into local communities.



*Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Source: Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, registration database of refugees who have arrived in Armenia since September 2023, as of March 2024*

# UNHCR's response

## Core relief items

At the onset of the emergency, UNHCR was able to quickly dispatch emergency relief items from its warehouse in the region. **Distributions of essential items such as hygiene kits, kitchen sets, mattresses, and folding beds were conducted in all 10 provinces**, with a focus on delivery to the most vulnerable refugees including older people, single headed households and people with disabilities.

As of the end of March 2024, **UNHCR, together with its partner Mission Armenia NGO, distributed 115,747 core relief items, benefitting 12,433 households (51,221 people).**

Items distributed included bedding (linens, blankets, pillows, sleeping bags, folding beds and

mattresses), household items (kitchen sets, electric heaters and solar lamps), warm clothing (winter jackets and gloves) and hygiene kits and towels.

Winter items such as blankets, winter clothing and warm bedding were a key focus of the delivery to ensure that families had adequate protection for the oncoming winter.

**27,739 people benefitted from receiving winter core relief items.** UNHCR also received in-kind support from corporate partners who have provided much needed winter clothing.

## Shelter

UNHCR assisted the Government in developing a shelter sector approach, mapping and making technical assessments of shelters in need of repair, so they could be used by refugees. UNHCR has also been working with partners to find dignified, longer term housing solutions for refugee families.

**Collective shelters have been rehabilitated or remodeled into apartments for families**, such as the former sports center in Masis, Ararat province. UNHCR worked in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to remodel the shelter into apartments to house 18 refugee families (46 people).

In addition, **UNHCR through its partner Mission Armenia, concluded renovation works** in Darbnik Social Housing complex, increasing its

accommodation capacity for refugees. UNHCR, through its partner Action Against Hunger, has started planning for small scale repair works of private housing, intended to support 50 households in Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions.

**UNHCR has also supplied refugee families with furniture and household appliances to furnish their new housing.** In the former sports center in Masis, UNHCR supplied 18 families (46 people) with washing machines, refrigerators with freezers, electric heaters, cookers and kettles, as well as bedding and towel sets. In Maralik Social Housing complex, UNHCR provided household items to support 17 families (27 people) who had to relocate after facing the risk of eviction.





© UNHCR Armenia. Refugee, Mariam, with her family and UNHCR staff members in Gyumri, Armenia.

Mariam is a refugee and mother of four children living in Gyumri, the second largest city in Armenia located in the northwest of the country. Thanks to UNHCR donors, the family received much needed items for winter, including beds and mattresses, pillows, towels, bed linen, a kitchen set, hygiene kits and warm clothes. These immediate needs have been met, however keeping a roof over the family's head is a constant concern.

***“Gyumri is a very hospitable place. People are kind. However, shelter remains a priority issue for us. We hardly managed to find this apartment, but the rent is so high that we can scarcely afford it. Moreover, the landlord has requested us to vacate it this April. We don't know what we can do, where we can go.”***

Longer term solutions to these issues are necessary, such as enabling refugees to find decent paid work and affordable accommodation options. It is critical that this is addressed so that families can have stability and live, work and study in their communities peacefully.

Mariam remains optimistic: ***“We enjoy the beauty of Gyumri and the generosity of its people. Gradually, the issues we are facing now, will be solved – we'll find jobs, our children will get used to their new school and find new friends. Your continued support is very crucial for us to achieve all this.”***

## Protection services

### Community outreach and protection monitoring

UNHCR maintains direct and regular communication with refugee-led and grassroots organizations in Armenia to ensure that we have a proper understanding of their needs and can provide appropriate support.

**UNHCR has visited 2,516 refugee households (11,618 people) in 10 provinces and Yerevan to understand their challenges and concerns.**

Through these interviews, vulnerable individuals were identified and referred for specialized services. UNHCR also conducted regular monitoring missions to the state-run reception center for asylum seekers and integration house for newly recognized refugees.

**Information sharing and specific community outreach to help prevent gender-based violence (GBV)** has reached vulnerable refugees in remote areas. Referral pathways were strengthened to support new arrivals to ensure that survivors of GBV can be identified and receive the support they need.

UNHCR's collaboration with refugee-led and community-based organizations ensures that refugees and host communities play a key role in the protection and assistance of those most in need. This collaboration is essential, as grassroots organizations lead projects which benefit the community including youth, sports and education activities, livelihood projects and health initiatives. **UNHCR provided financial support and technical assistance to five grassroots organizations**, enabling them to launch projects benefitting refugees and the local community.



© UNHCR Armenia. Refugee siblings living in Metsamor are playing with their new pillows just received from UNHCR to help their family endure the winter season. December 2023. Armavir province Armenia.



## Legal protection and access to services

Legal recognition and documentation are critical to ensure that refugees have access to protection and rights. UNHCR has provided technical equipment to help the authorities register new arrivals and assess the needs of refugee families. **With UNHCR's support, the Armenian Migration and Citizenship Service has issued some 78,000 refugee cards.**

Providing information to refugees about their protection status, rights and obligations is powerful. UNHCR contributes to the development of information materials for refugees about these topics so that they can better advocate for themselves and feel empowered to reach out to the services they are entitled to. **UNHCR has also increased staff to its telephone hotline, which received 6,538 calls from refugees** who received information about their legal status and entitlements since October 2023.

## Inclusion and cash assistance

### Becoming part of the community

Inclusion into host communities is critical for the wellbeing of refugees and enables them to work, learn and thrive in their new community. UNHCR works with partners and the Government of Armenia to **increase refugees' access to housing, the labor market and education.**

The solidarity of local communities in Armenia has been unwavering. Ongoing efforts focus on addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of refugees, while also supporting communities hosting them.

From the start, UNHCR has been working closely with the Government of Armenia to **include refugees in state assistance programmes including cash support for rent and utilities, access to state pension and maternity benefit schemes.**

Inclusion efforts are paying off. In January 2024, UNHCR conducted community level outreach in the Vayots Dzor region, to examine the level of inclusion of refugees in social protection schemes. The focus group of around 45 people confirmed that they currently have access to essential services such as health care, housing and food assistance. However, more work needs to be done

to improve employment prospects for refugees and to improve access to specific services such as psychological support and medical care for people with special needs.

### Cash assistance

Cash support remains one of the best and most dignified ways to directly assist refugees as well as provide a benefit to local communities. Money spent in local shops and services stimulates the local economy and boosts job creation. It allows refugees to use the money where it is most needed, particularly those with severe medical conditions and those with disabilities, so they can access specialized services.

**Since November 2023 and with UNHCR's support, 5,500 refugees received cash assistance each month to support the payment of rent and utilities.** As well as direct cash assistance, through partners, refugees have also received multi-purpose vouchers which can be used on essential items such as food, medication and winter clothing.



## Engagement with Development actors

UNHCR engaged with development actors, international financial institutions and diaspora groups to support local integration for displaced populations. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy with the World Bank, a significant achievement in

December 2023 was the addition of Armenia to eligible countries of the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), which offers concessional financing to middle-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees.



© UNHCR Armenia. Refugees Knarik (right) and Geghetsik (left) in their temporary home in Zorakan, Noyemberyan Tavush province, Armenia.

Knarik (right) and Geghetsik (left) are a mother and daughter. They live next to each other in small houses in Zorakan, a village in Noyemberyan Tavush province, northern Armenia.

***“Shelter and pension are the most essential things one can dream of at my age,” says Knarik. “The government and community have given me both.”***

Both mother and daughter speak warmly of the welcome that the community have provided to them. Geghetsik is a mother of eight children—she and her husband are urgently looking for work to support them. ***“We should help them get sound education and stand firm on their feet.”***

## Coordination

At the onset of the emergency, **UNHCR immediately scaled up its operations to respond to the urgent life-saving needs of refugees and facilitate the coordination of the humanitarian response.** The Government of Armenia and UNHCR established a Refugee Coordination Forum to ensure a coordinated response to the humanitarian situation. The Government and UNHCR also issued the inter-agency [Armenia Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#), which outlines the planned activities of 60 partners, **appealing for \$97 million** to respond to the urgent needs of refugees between October 2023 and March 2024.

This coordination model ensures that refugees are provided with life-saving aid as well as ensuring that long-term solutions for inclusion and self-reliance are integrated from the beginning, benefitting both refugees and host communities.

UNHCR produces [regular inter-agency updates](#) reporting on the activities of partners on the ground against expected targets.

UNHCR is working closely with relevant line ministries, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure to meet the protection and assistance needs of refugees.



© UNHCR Armenia, February 2024. Shirak province, Armenia. Refugees participate in the legal counselling sessions in Gyumri provided by UNHCR through the lawyers of partner NGO Mission Armenia.



© UNHCR Armenia. Margarit, a teacher and refugee teaches in her classroom in Hrazdan, Armenia.

Margarit is a refugee living with her family in Armenia. Margarit recalls that when she arrived, ***“I was gloomy, feeling homesick and distressed, absorbed in my sad memories all the time. It was not easy – we were trying to adapt to the new reality, hoping for a glimpse of light.”***

The local community gave them a warm welcome. ***“Gradually, we got to know our new neighbours and met new friends. They were so kind to us, very listening and supportive.”***

Margarit is a teacher and was eager to continue working, not only to support her family but to connect with children and parents in the community. ***“I was looking for a job, visiting local schools, sharing my CV, cherishing hope to work as a teacher like I did at home. I wouldn’t have dreamed that it could come true...Shortly after I was offered a job at Anaia Shirakatsi secondary school no. 6 in Hrazdan.”***

Margarit speaks warmly about her new workplace, which has become a supportive community. ***“That was a life-saving support that made a change in my life. My new workplace helped me recover, regain hope, earn a living and feel confident in my professional skills. I am grateful for the trust and solidarity of my colleagues, and their encouragement.”***



## Ongoing needs

As the number of arrivals to Armenia has stabilized and generous contributions from donors have been received, many of refugees' most immediate needs (such as core relief items like bedding, kitchen items and winter clothing) have been met. However, longer-term needs include stable accommodation, regular utility costs and tailored services for people with disabilities and other people with specific needs.

The top priority needs of refugees region remain access to affordable housing, employment opportunities and healthcare support.

It is critical that cash assistance for the most vulnerable refugee families continues so that they can pay rent and utilities. With a stable home base, families are more able to search for employment, send children to school and use any income on other essentials, such as medication.

Most refugee families have dependents, including children, older people and family members with disabilities. Older people and people with disabilities have limited access to services particularly in remote regions (Ararat, Kotayk, Gegharkunik, Lori, and Shirak) due to capacity issues.

Longer-term psychosocial support is also essential. Refugees often experience mental health challenges due to the separation from their homes and the stressful circumstances of their flight - isolation, stress and even trauma are common. Linking refugees to social programmes and psychological care can reduce this isolation and help them build friendships and feel like part of the community.



© UNHCR Armenia/Hrant Sahakyan. Refugees hosted in the temporary shelter in Masis, Armenia receive blankets and towels, among other items.

# Donor acknowledgement

UNHCR extends its thanks to our public and private donors who donated to the Armenia emergency, as well as those who provided flexible funding to general emergency preparedness and response in 2023. Your support has been invaluable to help and protect millions of people forced to flee by new and deteriorating crises.

Donors that contributed \$100,000 or above to the Armenia emergency response:

Australia | Canada | Central Emergency Response Fund | Czechia | European Union | Finland | France | Japan | Norway | Poland | Portugal | Private donors from Spain (España con ACNUR) | Private donors from Sweden (Sweden for UNHCR) | Private donors from the UK (UK for UNHCR) | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United States of America

## Flexible funding: a lifeline in emergencies

Flexible funds help UNHCR to prepare for the unpredictable – such as the refugee influx to Armenia – to kick-start an emergency response, and to help displaced people in forgotten or under-resourced crises. They also enable UNHCR to plan and manage resources efficiently and effectively to help save and transform lives.

Without flexible funding, we would not be able to properly prepare for any new emergency that may arise. Without flexible funding, the first phase of our emergency response, which delivers thousands of emergency supplies, essential

shelter and protection assistance to families in need, would struggle to get off the ground.

As our emergency response develops, flexible funding helps us provide longer-term support to displaced people and their host communities. When emergencies fade from the spotlight, flexible funding enables us to help those who are suffering most.

We could not do our job without such invaluable support, and we count on donors' continued solidarity for people affected by emergencies in 2024.

Cover photo: © UNHCR Armenia, February 2024. Refugee families living in Sevan community, Gegharkunik province receive winterization support including warm jackets, sweaters, hats, scarves and gloves donated by UNHCR corporate partners.