

ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION OF ASYLUM SEEKING, REFUGEE, AND DISPLACED CHILDREN IN ARMENIA



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Front cover: On 7 October 2015 in Croatia, in a dark and crowded reception centre for refugees and migrants, Mahmood, 7, from the Syrian Arab Republic and his sister Zahra, 5, receive stuffed animals, as their parents collect food, water, blankets and warm clothing. The family, along with 4,500 other refugees and migrants, will spend a few hours at this centre. UNICEF has set up two play areas that are away from the crowds.

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REPORT

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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF and UNHCR.

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Acronyms

ARCS	Armenian Red Cross Society
BT	Border Troops
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FAR	Fund for Armenian Relief
HRC	Human Rights Council
IGO	International Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MIPEX	Migrant Integration Policy Index
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PVD	Passport and Visa Department
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RSDP	Refugee Status Determination Procedure
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMS	State Migration Service
RCAS	Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Executive summary

Background

The purpose of the assessment is to understand the current protection risks and protection situation faced by asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia, while examining the existing legal and policy frameworks, as well as response capacities of stakeholders, including service providers to identify, respond to and protect displaced children at risk. It establishes a baseline in terms of the protection situation, maps and identifies relevant stakeholders and projects implemented at the national and local level, as well as the systemic protection gaps that need to be addressed in order to improve the protection situation for this vulnerable group.

Armenia acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1993. Armenia is also a signatory to a number of other major international and regional human rights instruments including the International Covenant on Economic, Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The second national Law on Refugees and Asylum adopted in 2009 (amended in 2016) incorporates most of the basic principles of refugee protection enshrined in the 1951 Convention and is overall of an acceptable standard. However, there are also a number of deficiencies in the Law, including in the area of child protection.

Displaced population in Armenia comprises of various groups, including:

- ethnic Armenians *prima facie* refugees from Azerbaijan,
- refugees from Iraq and Syria, the majority of whom are of Armenian origin: Since the start of the conflict in Syria and as of now over 20,000 Syrian-Armenians have arrived in Armenia;
- refugees from Ukraine as well as asylum-seekers and refugees from other countries.

Moreover, in 2015, there were 316 asylum-seekers applying for international protection. Though the majority of these people arrived from Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Iran, there were also those coming from Afghanistan, Guinea, Lebanon or Yemen.¹

The total number of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia is not known. Among 20 000 Syrian-Armenians, who reached Armenia in the past years, around 40-45 percent are estimated to be under 18.² According to the statistics published by the SMS, in 2015, among 104 persons from Syria seeking asylum in Armenia, 25 were children. Similarly, for the first quarter of 2016, among 15 asylum-seekers from Syria, three were below 18. In total, five children (both Syrian and non-Syrian) sought asylum in 2016, while the number was 95 in 2015.³

¹ Information available at the SMS' web-page: http://www.smsmta.am/?menu_id=144 (accessed 13.06.2016).

² This estimation is based on the average family composition and the available information and partial statistics.

³ Information available at the SMS' web-page: http://www.smsmta.am/?menu_id=144 (accessed 13.06.2016).

Methodology

Given the broad scope of the research area and need for analysing different systems (child protection, social assistance, protection of asylum-seekers and refugees) and different operational levels of these systems (decision makers, service providers, beneficiaries), qualitative data collection method was determined as the most appropriate for the purposes of this assignment. The combination of qualitative data collection methods used for this assessment included desk research, meetings with stakeholders, focus groups and interviews with target groups (children over 13 and adults) of the assessment as well as children drawings for children under 12.

Various groups of displaced persons living in Armenia, mainly Syrian-Armenians, Iraqi-Armenians, Iraqis, Ukrainians, Iranians, persons from Africa were reached out through the research. In total about 170 displaced persons were reached out during this assessment. Interviews conducted within this assessment were also complemented by observations made in dormitories (Nor Nork and Darbnik village), social houses run by Armenian Caritas and Mission Armenia, at the RCAS, and at schools No. 71, 14 and 114 in Yerevan and in Darbnik village (Ararat marz). In-depth interviews were also conducted with representatives of state institutions, teachers, local experts, social workers, NGOs, and UNICEF and UNHCR's staff. Analysis of key documents, interviews with stakeholders, observations, as well as interviews, focus groups, and other activities with asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced persons (both children and adults) were further cross-checked and tabulated against international and European standards related to protection, reception, and integration of displaced children.

The Main Findings

The main findings of this Assessment reflect the situation of refugee, asylum-seeking and displaced children with respect to the economic challenges, family relations, education, trauma, violence and other issues faced by the children and their families. While summary of main findings is presented below, each section and sub-section in Chapter 2 (Analyses and Findings) presents the issue in a sufficient level of detail based on collected data and its analyses, and contains some additional sub-findings.

Finding 1. Displaced persons living in Armenia face a number of economic challenges related to unemployment stemming from both the country's overall economic situation as well as rather high cost of living due primarily to high rents and utility tariffs and other factors. Ambiguous requirements for work permits create additional challenges for employment for the asylum-seekers. Consequently, displaced families and children experience reduced economic conditions compared to their country of origin, disillusionment, lack of stability and future prospects, all of which affects children economically and emotionally forcing some of them into early employment and dropping off from school.

Finding 2. Displacement has affected family status, relations and parenting skills and ultimately family integration into society creating additional stresses and pressures for children who have only recently undergone a dramatic transition. Some key factors contributing to the situation include:

- Lack of required documentation for registering civil acts results in limitation of rights, while different status of family members is sometimes determined by the desire to avoid army service. Challenges to family reunification are another factor in this respect.
- Limited access to health and social services and low awareness thereof coupled with general stress and desperation result in poor parenting skills, especially for single parents.
- Lack of relevant information on refugee/displaced rights and available opportunities, language barriers and perception of Armenia as a transit country challenge effective integration into Armenia society.
- Economic problems, separation of families, lack of stability affect the internal family dynamics and children oftentimes become witness to emotional turmoil and neglect.

Finding 3. While according to the Article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia the right to education is guaranteed to all and education is compulsory for children regardless their legal status, not all displaced children attend schools and access to the pre-school education is a challenge. There are also differences in access to education among Syrian-Armenian children and those of non-Armenian origin.

Finding 4: Most displaced children were exposed to a traumatic event in the country of origin, upon their journey, and after arrival in Armenia, but have not been offered much support to overcome the trauma either by families or by professionals.

Finding 5: There is no comprehensive data available on domestic and sexual violence among displaced population. There appears to be underreporting due to cultural stereotypes both in Armenia and in countries/communities of origin as well as low awareness of different types of sexual and gender-based violence, such as psychological, social or harmful traditional practices among the displaced. With respect to minority (ethnic, religious, etc.) mistreatment, the relevant group may perceive some instances of abuse or bullying, which are not reported to the police nonetheless.

Finding 6: While there are not many children who were identified as separated or unaccompanied in Armenia, it is partially due to low professional understanding of the issue and lack of systemic approach needed for identification of such cases. The current system for identification, protection, and reception of unaccompanied and separated children in Armenia requires additional improvements. Despite the existing relevant legal regulation of the issue, its enforcement remains faulty and in need of improvement. The child protection system in Armenia is not fully equipped to deal with these children. There is a need for a set of alternative arrangements such as foster care (or placing a child in a special centre where proper care is provided) for accomodating unaccompanied or spearated children as an alternative to RCAS.

Finding 7. Though the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia prohibits several forms of discrimination included based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity remain a taboo in Armenia. Consequently, specific information on the LGBTI displaced persons in Armenia, their situation and attitude of the society toward them is scarce and unreliable.

Finding 8. There is some disconnect and low level of cooperation between organizations involved in child-rights protection and support to refugees, as well other stakeholders involved

in issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. There are almost no joint initiatives in response to forced migration and child's rights. These two areas seem to operate separately. Two cross-cutting findings have common significance for all the other findings and conclusions of this assessment since they are related to availability of reliable data and systemic state-led integration efforts, including:

- a lack of **comprehensive statistics available** on asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons by gender, age, and country of origin including detailed statistics on persons of Syrian background living in Armenia.
- Currently, there is **no state integration strategy** for all displaced persons in place. Even though the SMS is working on the final document, it has not been finalized and made public yet.

Conclusions and Challenges

This assessment identified several good practices with respect to reception, protection and treatment of refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons in Armenia pertaining both to legal, policy framework, and the related practices. It should be noted that, overall, the Armenian policy towards Syrian-Armenian displaced persons is favourable in terms of access to the territory, possibilities of admission to Armenia, access to temporary stay permits and citizenship. Despite difficult economic conditions, Armenian authorities continue applying an open and welcoming policy towards persons of Armenian background arriving from Syria, but also from Iraq and Ukraine. Recent amendments of the Law on Refugees and Asylum have introduced several procedural guarantees to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees, but should be monitored strictly with respect to enforcement of those.

Access to education is almost fully ensured due to the legal requirement for mandatory elementary and secondary education, and efforts to adjust the content of education to the needs of new arrivals, especially children of Syrian-Armenian origin.

There are several projects in place to respond to the needs of displaced persons from Syria, who are currently residing in the country. They cover various types of issues, including language classes, psychological support, assistance on the labour market or support of self-employment.

Cooperation between and existing networks of different stakeholders working in the field of refugee protection and child's rights protection is existent, but still needs improvements. The reforms of the ISS and the child protection system in Armenia provide additional ground for enhanced protection of child's rights and for the improvement of the situation of displaced children.

In parallel to these positive tendencies, there exist a number of important challenges that should be overcome to ensure a fully favorable reception and protection system for refugee, asylum-seeking and displaced children in Armenia. These include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of holistic and integrated identification and referral system for displaced persons, including displaced children. There is also lack of available data on displaced population in Armenia and no comprehensive statistics on asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons available *inter alia* by gender, age, and country of origin.

- Due to economic hardships and considering Armenia a transit country, parents tend to focus on their own challenges, and they are not able to dedicate their time and consideration to children. These factors have a serious consequence on children's health, well-being, and access to education.
- Displaced persons in Armenia have various types of legal status, thus, they are entitled to a different set of rights and obligations. Even within one nuclear family, parents and children can have different legal status, for example, citizenship and a temporary stay permit.
- Others (see the relevant section for more details).

Recommendations

Recommendations that built upon the findings and conclusions resulting from this assessment are grouped under five key directions:

1. **Recommendations related to law and policy** to further enhance the Armenian standards on the protection of rights and well-being of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children. These include but are not limited to (see the relevant section for a full list):
 - The National Strategy on Protection of Children (2017-2020) should include a section on protection of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia.
 - Law on Refugees and Asylum, as well as Law on Foreigners, and relevant by-laws should be precise as to whether, and on which grounds asylum-seekers may apply for work permits and take up a job in Armenia. Article 54 of the Law on Refugees and Asylum should be amended to enable lodging of an application for family reunification in the territory of Armenia.
 - Legal framework and relevant guidelines developed should "secure proper representation of an unaccompanied or separated child's best interest"⁴ and should follow the CRC's General Comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin.
2. **Recommendations related to collaboration and capacity building** to strengthen the understanding of the asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children's situation and to sensitise various stakeholders to the specific protection needs of this vulnerable group.
 - Collaboration between different stakeholders working with asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced persons and child protection issues should be enhanced, and a holistic child needs and abuse identification, prevention, and referral mechanism should be further developed to involve all relevant stakeholders.
 - Training on child's rights should be provided to refugee-oriented NGOs and trainings on refugee law and policy should be provided to child-oriented NGOs. NGOs and state authorities should be trained on forced migration, child's rights, PTSD, trauma, torture, SGBV, best interest determination, and sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - The well-being of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children should be monitored to guarantee access to proper assistance and care for children in difficult life situations. Relevant stakeholders (in particular the ISS) should identify and counteract any difficult

⁴ Para 33, CRC, *General Comment No. 6*

and emergency situations. The Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees should be sensitised to the issues and problems of displaced persons and, in particular, displaced children.

3. **Recommendations on awareness raising campaigns** to strengthen understating of their rights and situation in Armenia by asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children and their parents.
 - This group should continue to be provided with practical knowledge on issues related to their rights and social, economic and psychological issues. To this end, new tools and new methodology (preferably a poster or an infographic) to inform asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons about their mandate and available activities should be developed. A comprehensive awareness-raising campaign on domestic violence and abuse should be prepared and launched for displaced persons. Awareness on the issue of sexual orientation, gender identity and displacement has to be increased. Enhancing parental skills should be addressed.
4. **Recommendations on integration** providing the key elements of the state's policy that need to be enhanced to improve the situation of displaced children and their families living in Armenia.
 - Having a comprehensive integration strategy is crucial for refugees' independence and self-reliance. This also concerns displaced children, who should be provided with a well-tailored assistance throughout the integration process. On the more practical side, there are several other steps to be taken including enhanced employment assistance and psychological support, enhanced family reunification through establishing required legal framework and a programme of microcredit to cover the costs of travel of family members of refugees and displaced persons to Armenia. Efforts toward education integration should continue.
5. **Recommendations on research, study, and evaluations** to further understand and elaborate on the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children's situation in Armenia, and thus improve the standards of protection.
 - A comprehensive system of data collection on the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children should be developed. It should be achieved through different research tools, assessments and surveys, including: a common nationwide platform for the exchange of statistical data on this group, a public opinion poll on the attitudes towards asylum-seekers and refugees and displaced persons, a comprehensive research on domestic violence and sexual violence among displaced population, an in-depth nationwide research on family situation and integration with the host society and its impact on children, etc.

Chapter 1. Assessment Methodology

Section 1. Background

Displaced population in Armenia is comprised of various groups including ethnic Armenians *prima facie* refugees from Azerbaijan, refugees from Iraq and Syria, the majority of whom are of Armenian origin; refugees from Ukraine, asylum-seekers and refugees from other countries, such as Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and a handful of African countries.

Since the start of the conflict in Syria over 20, 000 people from Syria arrived in Armenia.⁵ The Government continues, in principle, to take a generous approach in offering Syrian-Armenians a choice between three protection options:

- simplified acquisition of citizenship;
- accelerated asylum procedures which resulted in a 100 percent recognition rate, or
- privileged granting of short, mid-term or long-term residence permits.

UNHCR Armenia treats Syrian Armenians arriving in Armenia, who did not apply and receive *de jure* refugee status, as persons in a refugee-like situation who, notwithstanding their individual legal status and opportunity to be granted citizenship, continue to experience displacement-related vulnerabilities.

Displaced children and youth are particularly vulnerable and they require special care and assistance. Based on participatory assessment and direct service provision by UNHCR, NGO partners, and government partners, a number of child protection concerns and cases have been identified. These concerns include some difficulties accessing or continuing education, experience of trauma or violence pre-flight, unmet psychosocial needs and limited response capacities, separation of families, as well as possible unidentified cases of separated children, some cases of child abuse, exposure to domestic violence and possibly exploitation, and refugee children with disabilities facing challenges in accessing appropriate assistance and support

Addressing child protection in humanitarian action requires restoring and strengthening quickly a range of child protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation including separation of children from their families; association with armed forces and groups; exposure to SGBV, and psychosocial distress. Protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation have been one of the priority areas of UNICEF engagement in Armenia for many years.

Section 2. Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Assessment

UNICEF, together with UNHCR have commissioned this assessment to assess the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia. UNICEF will use the findings of the Assessment to support the Government of Armenia to strengthen and further develop a comprehensive child protection mechanism.

⁵ Information provided by Ministry of Diaspora (March 2016).

The main purpose of this assessment is to review the situation of child protection issues among refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons in Armenia. The three specific objectives of the Assessment include:

- to examine the existing legal and policy frameworks, as well as response capacities of service providers to identify, respond to and protect displaced children at risk;
- to conduct an initial assessment of the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia, and
- to prepare a list of recommendations for various stakeholders in Armenia.

The assessment is divided into several chapters and sections with Chapter 2 (Analysis and Finding) covering different aspects related to reception and protection of displaced children in Armenia such as integration, education, abuse and several others. At the end of the report, a list of key recommendations is presented grouped under several categories related to legal and policy aspect of protection, reception, and integration of displaced children, cooperation and capacity building, awareness raising and research.

Despite the scope covered by it, this assessment is not exhaustive and many of the identified challenges require further study and research. However, the author tried to tackle a broad spectrum of issues, including but not limited to the following:

- analysis of the capacity of child protection system operating in Armenia to address the needs of seeking, refugee, and displaced children;
- review of the existing assistance to asylum-seekers as well as integration offered to refugees and displaced persons;
- outlining the specific characteristics of groups of displaced persons in Armenia;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of referral mechanisms in the context of child protection;
- determination of gaps and development perspectives of child protection of displaced children.

Section 3. Assessment Methodology

The purpose of the assessment is to understand the current protection risks and protection situation faced by asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia, while examining the existing legal and policy frameworks, as well as response capacities of stakeholders, including service providers to identify, respond to and protect displaced children at risk. It establishes a baseline in terms of the protection situation, maps and identifies relevant stakeholders and projects implemented at the national and local level, as well as the systemic protection gaps that need to be addressed in order to improve the protection situation for this vulnerable group.

The assessment mainly covers capital Yerevan and in its suburbs (Zvartnots and Darbnik villages), where the majority of asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons are located.

The assessment addresses the following key questions⁶:

⁶ See Annex No. 2 for a full list of research questions.

1. What are the main protection challenges faced by asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia?
2. What are the reception and integration opportunities offered to asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children?
3. What is the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children regarding access to education, social assistance, housing and psycho-social assistance?
4. What are the main challenges asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children face in Armenia?
5. What are the good practices in terms of child protection and services offered to asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia?

Several tools and research techniques were used to gather required data and information in response to evaluation questions. Given the broad scope of the research and need for analysing different systems (child protection, social assistance, protection of asylum-seekers and refugees) and different operational levels of these systems (decision makers, service providers, beneficiaries), qualitative data collection method was deemed most appropriate. Thus, the initially proposed quantitative approach was replaced by qualitative methods since the lack of the up-to-date, sex, and age-disaggregated data on target population did not allow designing a representative sample for the survey that could provide valid and reliable data collection. The combination of qualitative data collection methods used for this assessment included desk research, meetings with stakeholders, focus groups and interviews with target groups of the assessment as well as children's drawings.

Desk research on the legal and policy documents, international standards and law, assessments and reports was conducted. It served for identifying outstanding issues, assessing the Armenian context, and listing the main challenges. Based on the desk research stakeholders relevant to the assessment were mapped, their roles and engagement levels outlined. Desk research also assisted in developing research tools, such as questions for stakeholders, in-depth questionnaire for asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children older than 13 years, drawing exercise for children up to 12 years, and open-ended questions for focus groups (and individual interviews) with adults. Analysis of key documents, interviews with stakeholders, observations, as well as interviews, focus groups, and other activities with asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced persons (both children and adults) were further cross-checked and tabulated against international and European standards related to protection, reception, and integration of displaced children.

During the in-country mission of the international expert for this assessment, several meetings with stakeholders were organised. The team led by an international and national consultants conducted in-depth interviews with state institutions, teachers, local experts, social workers, NGOs, UNICEF and UNHCR's staff. Information gathered during these interviews was further analysed, compared, and assessed. The interviews aimed at identifying major challenges faced, gaps in the legal and policy system, but also identifying good practices, projects, and activities carried out by various stakeholders.

Finally, a number of focus groups, individual interviews, and other activities were conducted with asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons living in Armenia including three main groups of respondents:

- 6 to 12 years old children;

- 13 to 18 years old children;
- adults.

A set of research tools was developed for each identified group. However, due to various circumstances and objective conditions, there were some variations in terms of tools eventually used. The researchers did their best to reach out to various groups of displaced persons living in Armenia, mainly to Syrian-Armenians, Iraqi-Armenians, Iraqis, Ukrainians, Iranians, persons from Africa. In total about 170 displaced persons were reached out during this assessment. Interviews conducted within this assessment were also complemented by observations made in dormitories (Nor Nork and Darbnik village), social houses run by Armenian Caritas and Mission Armenia, at the RCAS, and at schools No. 71, 14 and 114 in Yerevan and in Darbnik village (Ararat marz). The following table presents detailed information on respondents involved in data collection through different methods.

Box 1 - Table of the target groups, number of respondents, and research tools		
Group	Tools implemented	Number of respondents
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups In total 4 focus groups were scheduled: with Syrian-Armenians living in Yerevan and close to the city, residents of Darbnik dormitory, Yazidi refugees and Ukrainian asylum seekers and refugees 	40 persons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual interviews with asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons, including youth and persons who lived in the RCAS, dormitories, and social houses 	15 persons
	In total	55 persons
Children 13-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups In total 4 focus groups were scheduled 	40 persons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual interviews 	15 persons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-standardised questionnaire with Syrian-Armenians and Iraqi-Armenians 	27 persons
	In total	82 persons
Children 6 -12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing exercise followed up by an in-depth interview 	29 persons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group with Syrian-Armenian children 	8 persons
	In total	37 persons
Total number of respondents		174 persons

3.1 Data Limitations

This assessment covers the broad spectrum of issues including protection, reception and procedural challenges faced by asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia. This is why it was difficult to address all of these issues during a limited period of time. Selecting issues and problems, and limiting the scope of future assessment will be beneficial to prepare the in-depth analysis.

The complexity and cross-sectoral nature of the issues covered by this assessment imply a wide range of stakeholders with some role to play in the protection of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children. It is possible that during the limited assessment period, not all stakeholders involved could be approached for in-depth discussions and interviews. Moreover, due to the complex migration situation in Armenia, reaching out to a diverse group of displaced persons was problematic. Additional channels of communication, such as snowball technique, should have been implemented. However, this technique requires time, which was not an option during this assessment.

Finally, access to relevant data and statistics was not possible. There is no comprehensive information collated from different stakeholders that would assist in analysing the phenomenon of forced migration and children's situation in Armenia.

3.2 Ethical standards and considerations

During all the stages of planning, preparation and execution of the assessment several ethical standards were taken into consideration. Ethical Guidelines and Standards of the Ethical Research Involving Children were consulted.⁷

The assessment process emphasized security and well-being of all respondents, in particular, children. This is why psychologists conducted all interviews with 6-12 years' old children. The purpose and objectives of the assessment was explained to the children and they were informed about their right to refuse answering any question as well as asking their own questions at any time. Adult respondents were also given a chance not to disclose any information or data and ask questions. In case a child was not able to speak Armenian or preferred to speak in his/her native language interpreter assistance was used. Moreover, developed questionnaires for 13-18 years old children were available in Armenian, Russian, and Arabic. Before interviews with children, parents were informed about the scope and objectives of the assessment and were asked to sign the consent forms that were available in Armenian, Arabic and English languages.

The interviewed persons who had legal or social issues were referred to specialized NGOs for further assistance. If required, a psychologist was available to assist with any immediate psychological problems.

The anonymity of all interviewed displaced persons was guaranteed during all the stages of the assessment.

3.2 Human rights and gender considerations

Human rights and gender-related principles guided the entire process of preparing this assessment. Thoughtful inclusion and consideration of gender, equity, and child rights protection were crucial throughout of its stages including design, selection of respondents, analysis and drafting.

⁷ UNICEF, *The Ethical Research Involving Children*, 2013.

Chapter 2. Analysis and Findings

This part of the report presents the key findings of the assessment and lays out the underlying analysis. Chapter 2 opens with a section on the country context and is followed by seven sections and sub-sections that summarize the critical areas affecting asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons situation in Armenia, including children. Sections 2-7 start with a summary finding that reflects the situation analysis included in the relevant section, while in section 8 (Other Issues) the relevant findings open each sub-section. International experience and/or best practice with respect to that specific issue, topic or policy follows the related finding. The subsequent sub-sections elaborate on the finding and provide additional analysis and details.

Section 1. Country Context

1.1 Economic Situation

According to the most recent update of the 2011 census, Armenia's population is estimated to be around 3,010,600. This number reduces every year due to decreased childbirth, but also due to labour migration of Armenian citizens mainly to the Russian Federation. The 2015 Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia report showed that around 9% out of 5184 of the surveyed households are involved in internal and external migration.⁸ This is mainly due to the difficult economic situation, high unemployment rate, and social conditions.

In 2014, the poverty rate in Armenia was 30%, which means that 900 000 Armenians were poor. Among this group, 19,1% were considered poor, 8,6% very poor, and 2,3% extremely poor. A household has to earn more than 40 264 AMD per month to cross the upper poverty line. The food poverty line in Armenia is 23 384 AMD per month.⁹ There are also differences in the poverty rate between the capital and the rest of the country. In Yerevan, it is 25%, while in other cities/urban areas and rural areas it is respectively 35,1% and 29,9%. Average monthly household income per capita amounted to 50 000 AMD in 2014 and monthly expenditures were mostly made on food, housing, electricity and heating, and transportation and communication.¹⁰

According to the 2015 "Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia" survey, larger households, i.e. those with more than 3 children, are exposed to a higher risk of poverty. The same concerns the female-headed households.¹¹ Children in general, are more exposed to poverty, especially if they live in a large family. Younger, disabled children or children raised by only one parent (often a single mother) are also in the risk group.¹² "In 2014, some 3.3% of children under 18 lived below the extreme poverty line and 34.0% lived below the poverty line."¹³

⁸ National Statistical Office, *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia*, 2015, p. 18.

⁹ Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 90 and 99.

¹¹ Ibid. pp. 45-46.

¹² Ibid. pp. 73-75.

¹³ Ibid. p 72

The economic situation in Armenia is difficult. The global financial crisis has influenced the country significantly and the economic growth still remains well below the double-digit pre-crisis growth. The World Bank forecasts that economic growth will slow down further for the next years. Armenia is a lower middle-income country with per-capita GDP around 3,800 USD. Remittances from those working abroad are important for the Armenian economy. Moreover, since the Armenian economy is closely connected with the Russian economy, its recent recession has had an impact on the situation in the country. One of the major challenges for the Armenian economy is poverty and limited job creation in the non-agriculture labour market. Finally, the unemployment rate for the third quarter of 2015 was 18,2%, which is an increase of almost one percent comparing the same quarter of 2014.¹⁴

1.2 Displaced Population in Armenia

There are three main groups of displaced persons in Armenia:

- Asylum-seekers – persons who have applied for international protection but have not yet received a final decision on their application. It means that they had fled their country of origin, arrived in Armenia to seek protection against persecution, war, and serious violations of human rights and formally applied for international protection at the border, or after they arrived in Armenia.
- Refugees – persons who were granted refugee status, due to "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."¹⁵
- Persons, who did not apply for international protection, but are in a refugee-like situation. This group "is descriptive in nature and includes groups of persons, who are outside their country or territory of origin, and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained."¹⁶

In 2015, there were 311 asylum-seekers¹⁷ applying for international protection in Armenia. The majority of them arrived from Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, and Iran but also, there were persons from Afghanistan, Guinea, Lebanon, and Yemen. While many, though not all, applicants from Syria, Ukraine and Iraq were recognised as refugees, claims for international protection lodged by persons from Iran were mostly rejected.¹⁸

A group of persons in a refugee-like situation consists mostly of Syrians who have Armenian ethnicity. The state's policy towards this group and Armenian Diaspora is generally open and welcoming, they are invited to come and settle in their historic motherland. As of beginning of 2016, over 20.000 Syrian-Armenians have arrived in Armenia.¹⁹

¹⁴ World Bank, *Armenian - country overview*, available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/armenia/overview> (accessed 28 March 2016).

¹⁵ Article 1(A)2 of the Convention related to the status of refugees.

¹⁶ UNHCR, *Online Population Database: Sources, Methods and Data Considerations*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/45c06c662.html> (accessed 29 March 2016).

¹⁷ Data provided by UNHCR.

¹⁸ Information provided by UNHCR.

¹⁹ Information provided by Ministry of Diaspora (March 2016).

Box 2 - Good practice. Programmes and Assistance for Syrian-Armenians in Armenia

There are several short and long-term projects dedicated to Syrian-Armenian displaced persons implemented by such stakeholders in Armenia as the Ministry of Diaspora, UNHCR and NGOs.

Ministry of Diaspora implements and funds various projects for Syrian-Armenians covering a broad scope of issues such as support for small business, cultural exchanges, access to education at all levels, access to housing. The Ministry is closely cooperating with NGOs and other actors.

In general, short-term projects, such as summer camps and exhibition-sales, were financially supported and organised by UNHCR and other NGOs upon request by the Ministry of Diaspora. However, with respect to long-term projects targeting persons from Syria, UNHCR remains the lead agency in funding and implementing key interventions. This include rental-subsidy scheme, medical assistance, legal counselling, psychological support, language courses, training for start-up businesses and loans to assist implementing business plans, vocational training and distribution of income-generation tools. 'Child-to-Child' project promotes tolerance and friendship at schools while a fellowship scheme enrolls Syrian children in sports, handicraft and music classes. Other initiatives include cross-cultural awareness and exchange, tolerance projects for children and youth, psychological support to children at 'Sand Castle' play therapy centre, social clubs for women and others. 'Adopt-a-Family' and 'Join-the-Community' integration projects promote peaceful coexistence and integration in the society. These projects are combined with community mobilisation activities, cultural and sport events with the participation of local and refugee and displaced women, children and youth, as well as exhibition fairs and other public events.²⁰

The longer-term implementation of such operation in the past years has enrolled a large number of persons of concern into UNHCR and partners' projects (around 7000 persons), strengthened partnership of UNHCR with the Ministry of Diaspora, engaged NGOs and the civil society, including volunteers, and supporters.

UNICEF committed some of its limited resources to promote social inclusion of Syrian-Armenian children and their families in Armenia, and conducted in-depth investigation about the situation of children and women. During 2013-2014, UNICEF supported the strengthening of early childhood education through a comprehensive training programme for children (60) and teachers (19) creating the foundation for a child's physical, psychological, moral, and intellectual development. Furthermore, UNICEF provided a training for Syrian teachers and young professionals to provide psychosocial support to children, parents and caregivers, in order to address traumatic experiences from the ongoing conflict in Syria. Moreover, UNICEF in partnership with World Vision and Save the Children fostered the integration of over 250 Syrian-Armenian youth and school students into local communities through conducting a recreational and rehabilitation summer camp. In addition, UNICEF advocated and closely worked with relevant national and local government counterparts and CSOs to ensure the access to and integration of Syrian children into schools and preschools, as well as strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Education to register and track those children enrolled in the school system.

Since October 2015, UNICEF has recruited a Child Psychologist that provides psychological support to asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children and youth. The program includes individual psychological services and group psychological services (127 children and parents from Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine have benefitted from the program until today. 15 of them have been provided with individual psychological support, 112 others participated in

²⁰ Information provided by UNHCR.

group meetings. Individual play-therapy has been provided to 3-12 year old children. 12-25 year old adolescents and youth have benefitted from individual psychotherapy based on cognitive-behavioural and humanistic approaches).

In several regions in Armenia, ARCS implements a project called “Promoting Integration of Syrian Armenians (PISA)”. Syrian-Armenian families are provided with economic support (mentoring, vocational and language classes and start-up financial assistance) and with education assistance for around 1000 children (language classes and peer-to-peer assistance).²¹

Within Armenian Redwood Project, around 1000 Syrian-Armenians are provided with rental subsidies. A consortium unifying a number of different organisations involved in related activities, including UNHCR and Oxfam, has been set up. In 2016, the Project aims at continuing this type of assistance while adding a social services component.²²

Aleppo Compatriotic Charitable Organisation also implements various projects for Syrian-Armenians. Through "Adopt a family" project vulnerable families are put in contact with individual donors who want to support them. The organisation also created and runs a club for Syrian-Armenian adults, youth, and children. The club is located in Yerevan where several meetings and activities are organised throughout the year.²³

Syrian-Armenians are allowed to arrive in the country, enter the territory and apply for temporary stay permit valid for 1,5 or 10 years. There is also a fast-track citizenship procedure in place. A person of Armenian ethnicity can apply for citizenship prior his/her arrival at the Armenian consulate in Syria, but also immediately after arrival, and the final decision is issued within 6 months. As a result, over 15,000 persons of Armenian background (mainly Syrian-Armenians) have been granted citizenship, and around 1700-residence permits.²⁴

The existing conducive policy of the Armenian authorities provides easy access to the Armenian territory and then fast-track procedures related to granting Armenian citizenship. Hence, the majority of Syrian-Armenians displaced by the conflict in Syria usually do not apply for refugee status, as they may use alternative ways of admission to Armenia. Nevertheless, in case they decide to apply for refugee status, all of them are granted international protection.

There are some differences between these three groups in terms of rights and obligations. Asylum-seekers, who express their wish to seek asylum in Armenia, may enter Armenia without a visa and should be admitted to the territory. They may stay in the country during RSDP and be accommodated in the RCAS if there are available rooms. If there are not, they have to stay outside the centre and cover all relevant costs.²⁵ An identity document is issued to all asylum-seekers, which is valid for 3 months and has to be prolonged if RSDP has not been completed within a given period of time. Refugees in Armenia have full access to the

²¹ ARCS, Information about the project is available at: http://redcross.am/en/newsroom/Home/4/6/0/0/5/news_more/111 (accessed 29 March 2016).

²² See more at the project's web-page: <http://www.armenianredwoodproject.org/projectsindex/#affordable-housing> (accessed 29 March 2016).

²³ More information at Aleppo's web-page: http://www.aleppo-ngo.org/project_category/projects/ (accessed 28 March 2016).

²⁴ Information provided by PVD. See also: National Statistical Office, *TRANSMONEE 2015. Country Analytical Report (CAR). Data on Children of Armenia by Ethnicity*, Yerevan 2015.

²⁵ However, under the amended Act on Refugees and Asylum, vulnerable applicants who stay outside the RCAS will be provided with a financial assistance

labour market, education, medical care, social protection and may apply for family reunification. They are not obliged to serve in the army and have limited rights to property. Finally, a travel document (the so-called Geneva Passport) is issued to all refugees.

A foreigner (migrant), to arrive in Armenia, has to have a valid visa²⁶. S/he may apply for a permit to stay. There are three types of residence permits issued in Armenia: temporary (valid up to one year), permanent (valid for five years) and special (valid for 10 years).²⁷ Foreigners can apply for any of the listed permits. However, only persons of Armenian ethnicity can apply for a special permit, which is issued by the President of the Republic of Armenia and is valid for 10 years. Five and one-year valid permits may be extended multiple times and are issued based on the PVD's decision. Except for political rights and the full right to property, persons who possess a valid residence permit have basically the same rights as Armenian citizens. They are also not obliged to serve in the Army.

It is not easy to characterise displacement and migration setting in Armenia. There are ethnic Armenians *prima facie* refugees from Azerbaijan, refugees from Iraq and Syria (mostly of Armenian origin), asylum-seekers and refugees from Ukraine and other countries such as Iran, Turkey, and some African countries. These groups may differ in terms of problems and challenges faced.

A specific challenge identified during this assessment is the lack of comprehensive data on various groups of displaced population that would allow assessing and fully analysing forced migration in Armenia. There is no detailed (disaggregated by age and sex) data available on the total number of persons who arrived in Armenia either as asylum-seekers or being of Armenian ethnicity and displaced due to conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Estimates show that while in the past years around 2000 Syrian-Armenians decided to move to another state,²⁸ the exact number of displaced persons and families that left Armenia remains unknown.

According to the Ministry of Diaspora in 2015, there were 1500 Syrian-Armenian students in schools, 500 University students, and 240 children attending pre-school facilities.²⁹ Nevertheless, available data does not allow to present a holistic picture of displaced child population in Armenia.

²⁶ There are counties, whose citizens are exempt from the requirement of obtaining a visa prior arrival in Armenia or upon arrival in Armenian i.e. at the airport or a border crossing point. Citizens of Syria, Iran, Iraq and African countries are obliged to possess a valid visa prior arrival in Armenia. However, those who have Armenian origin are also exempt from the requirement of obtaining visa prior arrival. Full list available on the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' web-page: <http://www.mfa.am/en/visa/> (accessed 29 March 2016).

²⁷ Chapter 3 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Foreigners, adopted in 2015.

²⁸ Interview with the Ministry of Diaspora on 2 February 2016.

²⁹ Ibid.

Section 2. Economic Situation of Displaced Families

Finding 1. *Displaced persons living in Armenia face a number of economic challenges related to unemployment stemming from both the country's overall economic situation as well as rather high cost of living due primarily to high rents and utility tariffs and other factors. Ambiguous requirements for work permits create additional challenges for employment for the asylum-seekers. Consequently, displaced families and children experience reduced economic conditions compared to their country of origin, disillusionment, lack of stability and future prospects, all of which affects children economically and emotionally forcing some of them into early employment and dropping off from school.*

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

Difficult economic situation, reduced family livelihood opportunities, unemployment of parents, and dependency on social support might influence the situation of children in many ways. International studies have shown that displaced children could replace their parents as breadwinners and families could rely on income generated by them.³⁰ Children could also feel compelled to or be forced (either directly by their parents or seeing no other option) to work.

2.1 Economic Situation

The unemployment rate among the displaced group is very high. Almost 50% of Syrian-Armenians who live in Armenia do not work.³¹ Even though the majority of them have a high level of education or vocational and crafts skills³², they face challenges in finding a job. This especially concerns the newly arrived.³³

Many of the interviewed adults confirmed that they either did not work or worked on a temporary basis doing some minor jobs, or they were unemployed. They added that lack of source of income was a major challenge for them and their families. Some of the interviewed adults showed anxiety and depression when they were talking about problems in the labour market in Armenia. Syrian-Armenian adults often compared their current situation with that in their country of origin. They underlined that they had run small businesses and had been able to provide for their families. The majority of interviewed adults from Syria emphasized that they were able to live, pay for rent, and buy food in Armenia only due to their savings. However, without a job they would not be able to continue providing for their families for much longer.

Box 3 - Access to job market for displaced adults

In Darbnik dormitory, displaced men are able to find minor, seasonal jobs only repairing cars or fixing electronic equipment.

³⁰ UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, 'Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage', 2013, p. 35 and see for example: <http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CHILD-LABOUR.pdf> (accessed 27 March 2016).

³¹ Save the Children Armenia, *Child Rights Situation Analysis: Armenia*, 2015, p. 11.

³² Save the Children Armenia, *Summary of Research Results. Economic Integration of Population Displaced from Syria*, 2015, p. 19.

³³ Ibid. p. 20.

In Zvartnots village, where the Yazidi community lives, adults do not work at all. They are completely dependent on assistance provided by neighbours. Currently, they are living in a rural area where the main occupation is agriculture-related work. While in Iraq, they have never had any experience with livestock and do not know how to cultivate the crops.

Access to labour market is unclear for asylum-seekers. According to Article 21 of the Law on Refugee and Asylum³⁴, "asylum seekers and refugees (...) shall have the right to seek employment and work" in Armenia". On the other hand, Article 23 of the Law on Foreigners³⁵ does not list asylum-seekers as a group that may work in Armenia without a work permit. Article 23(j) refers only to "foreign citizens and stateless persons holding refugee status, having obtained political asylum in the Republic of Armenia". The Law on Foreigners is unclear as to whether an asylum-seeker may obtain a work permit without explicitly excluding such a possibility. Asylum-seekers interviewed for the purpose of this assessment said that if employed, they did not have any contracts and their employment was short-term.

Several interviewed adults stated that their families were dependent on food and financial support provided by state institutions and NGOs. Some of them have been dependent on such assistance for many years. Even if an adult has a job, s/he does not earn enough to provide for the family. This state of things is radically different from their situation in Syria, where, as reported by the interviewees, one working male could provide for the needs of the entire family.

Some interviewed adults in dormitories, social houses and those who rent apartments complained about prices of heating and, in particular, electricity. According to the 2015 Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia report, households use gas (43,8%, wood (33,2%) and electricity (16,8%) to heat flats and homes. In comparison with previous years the number of households using wood and electricity has increased.³⁶ Access to gas supply, in general, is not a problem in Armenia, as 81,8% of households have the needed infrastructure. More than 99% have access to electricity.³⁷ However, "spending on utilities made up 13,5% of the average monthly consumption expenditures of households, whereas that on natural gas comprised the largest portion relative to other utility services constituting 44,5% of all utility expenses in 2014."³⁸ The poorer the household the higher percentage of monthly income was spent on utilities. For example, non-poor households spent 13,2% of their income, while extremely poor - almost 17%.³⁹ The same is true about the use of electricity and natural gas with poorer households spending less on natural gas and more on electricity.⁴⁰

Box 4 -Situation of displaced families living in dormitories and social houses

Displaced families living in dormitories or social houses run by NGOs usually have to cover the cost of electricity. However, the electricity bills are so expensive that they cannot afford to pay them. For example, a woman who lives in a social house has to pay 45,000 AMD for electricity. Though she works, she earns only 55,000 AMD per month.

³⁴ Law of the Republic of Armenia on Refugees and Asylum, adopted in 2008, amended in January 2016.

³⁵ Law of the Republic of Armenia on Foreigners, adopted in 2015.

³⁶ National Statistical Office, *Social Snapshot...*, p. 164.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 165.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 166.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Syrian-Armenian children interviewed for this assessment on many occasions observed that their parents could not find a job in Armenia. Children, despite their age, were aware about the challenges that their parents faced in sustaining their families due to lack of job opportunities available for them. They often identified this as the main problem for their families.

According to Armenian Labour Code children, under 16 years, are prohibited from working full time in Armenia.⁴¹ Irrespective of the nature of work, children under 14 cannot be employed under any circumstances, while 14-16 years old children might work if parents (or a custodian) formally agrees.⁴² However, a child can only be employed "in temporary work activities, which do not harm his/her health, safety, education and morality in the manner prescribed by the Labour Code."⁴³

Nevertheless, this assessment identified (directly and indirectly) some cases of children under 18, who were working. Some interviewed children were already working while another group said that they were looking for a job and planned to work in the near future.

Box 5 - Displaced children and employment

A boy from Syria arrived in Armenia when he was 16 years. He arrived without parents who stayed in Aleppo, this is why he had to work to provide for himself. He did not attend school. Finally, he found a job in a bakery and was working near a stove. The working conditions were dangerous and not suitable for children.

Some interviewed children, in particular, boys, said that they were looking for jobs. A Yerevan school principle said she knew some children were working. Teachers were also aware of that, however, they tried to "understand this situation" and did not interfere as long as children managed to keep up with their classes and pass all the exams.

Young people who arrived in Armenia 4 or 5 years ago said that back in Syria they preferred to help their parents working in garages, beauty salons or restaurants. Hence, they did not graduate from a school in Syria. Upon arrival in Armenia, they decided that they would rather attend school for the purpose of future prospects and opportunities.

It should be noted that the most recent "Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia" report recommended that forced labour and labour trafficking cases should be better identified.⁴⁴ The report identifies 14 cases of child labour, but does not provide any information on children's ethnic background and nationality.⁴⁵

2.2 Lack of Stability and Prospects for the Future

Economic hardship and lack of opportunities and stability may also force parents to leave Armenia for another country, where they see potential prospects for their family. The total

⁴¹ Article 32 of the Armenian Constitution.

⁴² RA Labour Code, Article 17(2-4).

⁴³ OSCE, *Forced Labour...*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ OSCE, *Forced Labour and Labour trafficking in Armenia. Pilot Study*, 2015, p. 7, available at: <http://www.osce.org/yerevan/212571?download=true> (accessed 27 March 2016).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

number of asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced families who left Armenia is unknown. The estimates provided by the Ministry of Diaspora are only on Syrian-Armenians. According to them, in the past four years, more than 2000 Syrian-Armenians moved to another country.

Box 6 - Moving to other countries

The majority of interviewed adults and children said that they knew Syrian-Armenians (for example their family members, friends or colleagues) who moved to Turkey, Lebanon or decided to go back to Syria. Interviewed adults mentioned that there were cases of Syrian-Armenians leaving for Europe through Turkey and then the Mediterranean Sea and the so-called Balkan route. A family and a couple of young adults (male students) drowned when attempting to cross the sea.

Due to lack of perspectives, jobs, and stability, some Syrian-Armenians who were interviewed for this assessment, said that they were exploring opportunities for moving to another country. Those who have recently arrived in Armenia consider the country a transit state. During the focus groups and individual interviews, adults asked questions about possible opportunities, in particular, related to resettlement programme to Canada.⁴⁶ The majority of them wanted to move to that country because of either possible job and economic opportunities or family members, who had already been admitted there. Interviewed Syrian-Armenian adults wanted to apply for resettlement to Canada through IOM office in Armenia or go back to Lebanon to initiate the process there.

Interviewed Syrian-Armenian children confirmed that their parents were looking for opportunities to go to another country. They also added that they knew persons who already moved to Canada or to another country (mainly Turkey and Lebanon) to seek better economic opportunities.

In all visited schools, teachers confirmed that children and their parents considered moving out from Armenia. They also observed an increased number of children who stopped attending school. To illustrate, in Yerevan school No. 114 only, out of 44 Syrian-Armenian pupils who started the 2015/2016 school year, 17 dropped out as of January 2016 and never showed up in school afterwards.⁴⁷ According to interviewed teachers, the majority of these children left Armenia together with their parents.

2.3 Housing and Adequate Standards of Living

One of the biggest challenges for displaced persons in Armenia is access to affordable housing. Some interviewed adults underlined that they were not able to earn enough money to cover the costs of rent and utilities. Others mentioned that they had been dependent on rental subsidies provided by NGOs and the state.

⁴⁶ The Canadian Government announced to resettle 25 000 Syrian refugees. Information available at web-page of the Canadian Government: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/overview.asp> (accessed 10 March 2016).

⁴⁷ Interview with the director of the school No. 114 in Yerevan (12 February 2016).

Box 7 - Emergency housing assistance to displaced Syrian-Armenians

In 2015, Oxfam Armenia, UNHCR and the Armenian Redwood Project signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding to create an emergency housing assistance and rental subsidy to displaced Syrian-Armenians. The project is implemented by Mission Armenia, which runs social houses and also provides displaced families with rental subsidies. From January to October 2015, a total of 941 families were offered financial support.⁴⁸

Those who do not have financial resources to cover the cost of rent may stay in dormitories run by the state. Currently, out of seven dormitories, only Darbnik and Nor Nork dormitories provide shelter to displaced persons. As of January 2016, in total 137 persons lived there, all of them of Armenian origin. There are also three emergency social houses run by Mission Armenia where displaced persons and families may be accommodated.

The majority of interviewed Syrian-Armenian and Iraqi-Armenian children complained that they did not have proper conditions to do their homework or to study. Parents emphasized that they are not able to pay the rent and the assistance they get from NGOs or the Ministry of Diaspora is not enough. Some of them added that landlords raised the rent when they learned they are dealing with Syrian-Armenians.

Box 8 - Housing conditions

The conditions in different dormitories are different. In Darbnik and Nor Nork, residents have to cover the costs of utilities themselves. In social houses of Mission Armenia, the conditions were not predefined and residents had to negotiate the utility costs with the organisation during the winter months. Eventually, it turned out that the residents should cover around 50% of costs. The Guest House of Armenian Catholic Church, which is temporarily adapted for a social house for Syrian Armenians, is covering not only the utility expenses, but also providing meals. There are also different admission criteria in place. While state authorities and Mission Armenia have a list of defined criteria, the Armenian Catholic Church accepts just everyone. Within this assessment, cases of service shopping were identified. There were some Syrian-Armenians, who got accommodation in social houses run by Mission Armenia NGO, but at the same time were living in the Guest House of the Armenian Catholic Church.

Another important observation concerns the level of integration of different groups. In general, residents of social houses and dormitories are less integrated comparing to those who rent apartments.

Rental subsidy amount is 60 000 AMD and is paid for up to three or six months. Neither the amount nor the timeframe of rental subsidies provided is sufficient to respond to the housing needs of displaced persons living in Armenia.

⁴⁸ Information provided by UNHCR.

Section 3. Family and Parents

Finding 2. *Displacement has affected family status, relations and parenting skills and ultimately family integration into society creating additional stress and pressures for children who have only recently undergone a dramatic transition. Some key factors contributing to the situation include:*

- Lack of required documentation for registering civil acts results in limitation of rights, while different status of family members is sometimes determined by the desire to avoid army service. Challenges to family reunification are another factor in this respect.
- Limited access to health and social services and low awareness thereof coupled with general stress and desperation result in poor parenting skills, especially for single parents.
- Lack of relevant information on refugee/displaced rights and available opportunities, language barriers and perception of Armenia as a transit country challenge effective integration into Armenia society.
- Economic problems, separation of families, lack of stability affect the internal family dynamics and children oftentimes become witness to emotional turmoil and neglect.

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

- Families and parents have a critical influence on the well-being and development of a child. "Families can be the greatest source of support for children but also – under unfortunate circumstances – the greatest source of harm. Children's well-being is therefore inextricably linked to parental well-being (...)." ⁴⁹ This is why parenting support focused on education, support and health-related intervention are crucial for the well-being of their children. ⁵⁰ Parents' behaviour, action or in certain cases inaction has a great influence on a child's situation, protection and well-being. General atmosphere at home has an impact on children. Sadness, depression, inability to cope with the situation, parents being less receptive to children's problems are among the main issues that displaced families have to face.
- The process of integration of refugees is "complex and gradual, comprising of three distinct but inter-related dimensions (legal, economic, and social and cultural) all of which are important for refugees' ability to integrate successfully as fully included members of society". ⁵¹ Integration allows rebuilding lives, learning how to function in the host society and self-sufficiency. ⁵² The legal dimension "involves the establishment of a legal framework in which refugees gradually attain a wider range of rights in the host State" ⁵³ leading to citizenship. Another, economic dimension, allows establishing the secure livelihood, the source of income allowing for self-reliance. Finally, social

⁴⁹ UNICEF, *Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context*, 2015, p. 5, available at: http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/01%20family_support_layout_web.pdf (accessed 30 March 2016).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵¹ UNHCR Executive Committee, *Conclusion on Local Integration*, No. 104 (LVI), 7 October 2005.

⁵² UNHCR, *The Benefits of Belonging. Local integration options and opportunities for host countries, communities and refugees*, p. 6, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4e3276e26.html> (accessed 28 March 2016).

⁵³ Ibid., p. 7.

aspect assists refugees to develop a sense of belonging and to properly navigate through the host society.

- Integration of refugees "is all about partnerships and collaboration between agencies and countries in the pursuit of collective solutions".⁵⁴ The state role in developing and implementing integration strategy is crucial. An ultimate goal for the success of integration is to build a strong group of different actors to provide well-tailored assistance and support.

3.1 Personal Identity, Legal Status and Family Reunification

Many Syrian-Armenians who arrive in Armenia usually have only a passport and a Syrian family book.⁵⁵ For the purpose of entering Armenia and applying for citizenship or residency permit, not all documents required by law are necessary. The Armenian authorities implement a liberal policy towards documents confirming one's Armenian origin. In practice, one is not obliged to present a birth or marriage certificate.

At the entry stage and later, during proceedings for granting residence permit or citizenship, lack of documents and certificates is not considered a problem.⁵⁶ However, according to the Ministry of Justice⁵⁷, Syrian-Armenians who are not able to present all required documents, *such as* a birth or a marriage certificate, cannot change their name or get a divorce. This also concerns those, who were granted Armenian citizenship or a temporary stay permit. As a result, these persons cannot exercise their civil rights. Recognition of school diplomas and certificates also remains a problem for displaced persons living in Armenia. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Diaspora stated that the recognition of diplomas of Syrian universities was not an issue anymore.⁵⁸ Due to time limitations of this assessment, this problem has not been further analysed. The Ministry of Justice underlined the need to develop and implement a set of tools and practical procedures to solve these issues.⁵⁹

Another identified problem concerns youth males and boys who do not apply for Armenian citizenship together with their family members. This situation is common in general to Syrian-Armenian boys and youth males. They try to avoid conscription and military service, which is obligatory for all men in Armenia. Consequently, members of one family have different legal status. Parents and female family members usually have Armenian citizenships, while boys and male youth possess only temporary stay permits. This situation may, however, influence family unification and limit freedom of movement.

Although Armenia obtained a high score in the MIPEX report, the procedure of family reunion is not developed despite the favourable legal provisions related to family reunification of resident permit holders. According to Article 15(1)(d) of the Act on Foreigners⁶⁰ a temporary

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁵ Many interviewed Syrian-Armenian displaced persons underlined that they had only these two documents.

⁵⁶ Interview with OVIR (9 February 2016).

⁵⁷ Interview with the Ministry of Justice (5 February 2016).

⁵⁸ Ministry of Diaspora, information available at: <http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/News/3948> (accessed 29 March 2016).

⁵⁹ Interview with the Ministry of Justice (5 February 2016).

⁶⁰ Law on Foreigners, adopted on 25 December 2006.

residence permit is granted to a person who is "a close relative (parent, brother, sister, spouse, child, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild) of a citizen of the Republic of Armenia or of a foreigner holding permanent residence status in the Republic of Armenia". The situation is similar with the permanent residence permits, which, under Article 16(1) of the Act on Foreigners, are granted to close relatives (parents, spouses, siblings, children, grandparents, grandchildren). An applicant has to prove that there are close relations between these persons and s/he has a sufficient means to cover the cost of their stay in Armenia. Regarding refugees, they may apply for family reunification with a spouse, child, any other dependent but also, in the case of an unaccompanied or separated child, with parents and siblings (Article 54(1) in relation to Article 7(1) and 7(3) of the Law on refugees and asylum).

Despite the favourable law, "the major area of weakness is the authorities' wide discretion in the procedure. Applicants can be rejected without due account taken of their personal and family circumstances and without the right to represent themselves before an independent administrative court".⁶¹ Moreover, there are several challenges with the execution of reunification with a family member, who resides in a country, where there is no Armenian diplomatic representation. According to Article 54(1) of the Law on Refugees and Asylum, a family member has to apply to a diplomatic representation in a given country or in the closest country in case of no diplomatic mission. The major challenge is the African countries. There is only one Armenian Embassy on the African continent, in Cairo, Egypt. The cost of travel to Armenia from, in particular, African countries is very high. Interviewed displaced persons said that they did not have sufficient financial means to support their family members and to pay for their travel to Armenia or for a travel to the nearest Armenian Embassy to lodge a request for a family reunification.

In such cases, some EU states do not require a pre-entry test for a family member of a refugee to be taken.⁶² In Ireland, for example, if there is no Irish Embassy present or it cannot be reached, an application for family reunification could be lodged on the territory of the country.⁶³

3.2 Parental Skills

According to the findings of this assessment, displaced parents may not always be able to provide proper care for their children. This is due to the difficulty of the situation, health problems, and depression, which is more severe in case of single parents who are left alone with their issues and tend to focus on their own situation.

In the case of single pregnant women, adults interviewed for the purpose of this assessment said that they had neither a network nor information or access to the services on the ground to support them during and after pregnancy. This also concerns young displaced parents. There is also a limited access to outreach health services for young children and parents. As

⁶¹ ODIHR and MPG, *Armenia...*, p. 10.

⁶² T. Strik, B. De Hart, E. Nissen, *Family Reunification: a barrier or facilitator of integration? A comparative study*, p. 35, available at: http://research.icmpd.org/fileadmin/Research-Website/Project_material/Family_Reunification{EIF/FamilyReunification_transnational_report.pdf (accessed 5 March 2016).

⁶³ Leaflet on the Family Reunification published by Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, available at: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Family%20Reunification%20Info.%20Leaflet.doc/Files/Family%20Reunification%20Info.%20Leaflet.doc> (accessed 5 March 2016).

a result, single mothers and young parents have limited opportunities to learn and gain skills on how to take care of a newborn baby, infant, and toddler.

Interviewed parents are not aware of various projects implemented by NGOs on parental skills. There are no activities and training with nurses and medical personnel dedicated exclusively to displaced parents. Peer support and more broad social support to newly displaced parents, and, in particular, to single parents is not in place as well.

3.3 Integration

Introducing an integrated and holistic integration strategy is crucial for displaced persons to function in the Armenian society. Currently, the refugee integration strategy is being developed by the SMS and the first draft is expected at some point in 2016.⁶⁴ Many interviewed displaced persons were not aware of their rights and integration opportunities offered. They did not know where to find assistance, what kind of support is offered, and what is the role and position of stakeholders involved. Save the Children Armenia observed that Syrian-Armenians' knowledge on their rights and legal situation in Armenia is rather limited. The available leaflets and brochures are not sufficient to raise their awareness.⁶⁵

Lack of knowledge of the Armenian language hinders proper integration and does not help to find a job. According to Save the Children Armenia, Syrian-Armenian adults have problems with Eastern-Armenian.⁶⁶ These challenges faced by parents have a direct impact on the situation and well-being of children, who sometimes have to assume the position and role of their parents.

Box 9 - Children assuming parental roles

Two brothers (10 and 9 years old) live with their mother. The father does not live in Armenia, while the mother does not speak Armenian. The boys assist her to communicate with the outside world, they assist her in shops, answer the phone calls, etc. As a result, children assume the role of their parents that are not suitable for their age. Moreover, such a situation may have a negative impact on their emotional state. Interviewed brothers complained about the situation and the role they had to play.

Many displaced persons interviewed for the purpose of this assessment confirmed that they considered Armenia only as a transit point on the way to another state. This is due to several factors discussed in section 2.1. This, however, hinders the potential integration with the host society, because the focus is on how to move rather than being on how to adapt to the new reality.

Considering Armenia as a transit country by adults and, foremost, by parents may influence the situation, protection, and well-being of children. In such case, the family situation is not stable since yet another departure may take place at any time or parents may be concentrated on organising a trip. Moving to another place often becomes the ultimate goal for the whole

⁶⁴ Interview with the SMS (1 February 2016).

⁶⁵ Save the Children Armenia, *Summary of Research Results...*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

family, which is why less attention is paid to the situation of children. Some of the interviewed children observed that their parents did not pay enough attention to their problems. They were also aware of the parents' plans, expectations and, sometimes, of their desperation and anxiety to move. Like their parents, children were looking forward to moving to another country.

On the other hand, there was a high level of false expectations among interviewed displaced persons. They were frustrated because departure to another state was not possible or real in the coming months. Some of them were desperately looking for advice how to move, whom to contact, and how to handle the process. While anxious about the lack of possibilities to leave Armenia, they did not explore enough the existing opportunities for integration.

Interviewed teachers complained that children were leaving school during the school year. They explained that the majority of them were leaving Armenia for other countries. Consequently, children could not finish a school year and move to a higher class. They did not receive any diplomas or certificates.

3.4 Family Relations

Lack of integration opportunities, unemployment, anxiety, frustration, and considering Armenia only as a transit country has a negative impact on family relations. Interviewed children were asked to reflect on this issue and their feedback allowed revealing several cases of conflicts, divorce, separation from parent(s) and limited emotional connection between family members.

Box 10 - Children's stories about their families

An 8 year-old girl, who lives with her father, grandmother, and grandfather, when asked to draw her family, focused on the nature (sun, clouds, flowers, and butterflies). Her mother, who lives together with a sister outside Armenia, was portrayed just as a face and her sister as a stone creature. There was also a clear separation line between her mother and girl's house in Armenia.⁶⁷ The girl is sad and anxious because her mother is not with her.

Some children portrayed their parents, grandparents and siblings with large arms or fingers; they added pets and outsiders to their drawing. This can indicate aggression.

Younger children, when asked to draw their families, tend to create their own imaginary world with imaginary siblings, pets, and characters. Older ones were sentimental about their hometown, friends, pets, and family members left behind. When asked to compare the life in Armenia and in their country of origin, they answered that it was much better at home. It was more peaceful, easier, and without financial difficulties. Some children emphasized that they were abandoned twice. First, when they had to flee Syria and left their fellow family members and friends there, and then after arrival in Armenia when one of their parents (or both parents) or older siblings had to go to another state to work and provide for the whole family.

Children expressed fear, aggression, anxiety and depression, insecurity, abandonment, and rejection through their drawings and shared stories. They described difficult relations between their parents, between them and their parents. Family members were often drawn apart,

⁶⁷ See Annex 8 - drawing No. 1.

separated one from another. It appeared that the family's economic situation was often discussed at home and was a reason for family conflicts, which children witnessed thus becoming aware of the problems that adults had to overcome.

Some interviewed children also spoke about quarrels and fights that happened within their families. Parents were shouting at each other, they were anxious, sad, and stressed. Taking into account that adults faced challenges in integration, finding a proper source of income, and were in practice dependent on the social assistance and support, such reactions are to be expected. Children understood that economic difficulties were a primary concern for their parents saying that adults could not find employment and if they did, it was a temporary job only.

Another factor to affect children adversely is separation from family members working/living abroad, which leaves children without one or both parents.

Box 11 - A story of a displaced girl on her relations with her father

An 11 year-old girl lives in Armenia with her mother while the father works abroad. She says that the day her father left for another country was the worst for her. She said she cried a lot and was very sad.

Section 4. Access to Education

Finding 3. *While according to the Article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia,⁶⁸ the right to education is guaranteed to all and education is compulsory for children regardless their legal status, not all displaced children attend schools, and access to the pre-school education is a challenge. There are also differences in access to education among Syrian-Armenian children and those of non-Armenian origin.*

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

Access to pre-school education is crucial for the development and integration of displaced children. It gives them language skills and knowledge and, thus, prepares them to fully participate in classes at schools. This is why displaced children should be sent to kindergartens or day care facilities shortly after their arrival.

4.1 Access to Pre-School Education

Currently, many displaced children stay at home with their parents and some of them do not have contact with their peers. Hence, they often witness problems and trauma faced by their parents, which has a negative influence on child's development and well-being.

In general, access to pre-school facilities in Armenia is limited. According to Save the Children Armenia, only 27% of children are enrolled in some type of preschool facility.⁶⁹ The majority of households interviewed for the “2015 Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia” explained that a child was not enrolled in a kindergarten because there was a non-working mother that could take care of him/her. Only 6,4% indicated that there was no place in a kindergarten available.⁷⁰

However, interviewed displaced persons said that they faced difficulties in sending their children to state and private kindergartens. The latter is too expensive, while there were no places available in the state kindergartens.

To illustrate, in Darbnik dormitory the kindergarten did not operate regularly. During the winter months, it was closed for a couple of weeks due to limited financial resources to cover the cost of heating. At that time, children had to stay with their parents. Among four pre-school aged children living in the RCAS, only one attended kindergarten. The main reason for that was the lack of available vacant places, but also lengthy enrolment process. Parents from the RCAS complained that issuing a decision took several months. The same situation was observed during the visits to Nor Nork dormitory and social houses run by NGOs. Children living there were not enrolled in a kindergarten and stayed with their parents.

⁶⁸ This section does not include information on the amendments of the Constitution accepted in the 2015 referendum.

⁶⁹ Save the Children Armenia, *Serving Children and their Families. Armenia Annual Report*, 2015, p. 6.

⁷⁰ National Statistical Office, *Social Snapshot...*, p. 142.

4.2 Access to Primary and Secondary Education

Access and Integration: Displaced children generally and those with Armenian background in particular, attend schools. According to Save the Children Armenia's report, schools, and education facilities promote and support the integration of Syrian-Armenian children.⁷¹ There is also a clear policy in place to accept and facilitate the learning process of this particular group. For example, special classes with Arabic curriculum were set up in 2012 as a short-term solution. Moreover, after one year, it was decided that due to the fact that this approach did not support the proper integration of Syrian-Armenian students into the Armenian education system, the classes with exclusive Arabic curriculum were terminated. Currently, there are separate classes for Syrian-Armenians in one school in Yerevan; however, they follow the Armenian curriculum. One of the reports consulted for the purposes of this assessment recommends employing Syrian-Armenian teachers to reduce learning difficulties.⁷² However, there is rather a need for cultural assistants⁷³ working at schools and facilitating the process of communication and pupils' adjustment to the new education system and curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Science is planning to introduce teaching assistants in schools, who will be supporting and assisting the class teacher in the day-to-day work and responding to pupils' needs. These assistants could also serve as cultural assistants mentioned above. What is crucial for a cultural assistant is to speak the language understandable to a foreign pupil and to understand the specific needs of asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children.

There is no institutionalised national level support for students who do not speak Armenian and are of non-Armenian origin.⁷⁴ Despite the fact that the general education system in Armenia is not discriminatory against non-Armenian students and allows asylum-seeking, recognised refugees and migrants' children to enrol and attend schools, there are no specific programmes for non-Armenian children. During this assessment, several cases of children, who do not attend school, were identified. These were non Syrian-Armenian asylum-seekers and refugees.

Box 12 - Access to education for displaced children

A 7 year-old boy living in the RCAS has never attended a school after his arrival in the country and there have been difficulties with his enrolment.

Three Arabic speaking children from Iraq did not attend school. They arrived in Armenia in October 2015 and have since had to stay at home. Their father argued that there were no schools with Arabic curriculum in Yerevan available and he was rather reluctant to send children to an Armenian school. His knowledge about the rights and obligations related to education was very limited and he was not well informed about the Armenian education system.

Two school-age Yezidi children living in Zvartnots village have stayed at home since July 2015, i.e. after their arrival in Armenia. The parents argued that they did not know the

⁷¹ Save the Children Armenia, *Summary of Research Results...*, p. 17.

⁷² Save the Children Armenia, *Summary of Research Results...*, p. 24.

⁷³ Cultural assistant is a person who usually has a similar background and experience as displaced children. This person understands the language spoken by a pupil and a teacher. Cultural assistant is to support a child, facilitate between a child and a teacher, but also serves as a link between teacher, school and parents.

⁷⁴ ODIHR and MPG, *Armenia. A Migrant Integration Policy Index assessment*, 2013, p. 11.

Armenian language and there was a need for a teacher speaking Yezidi to be employed at the nearby school.

Content of Education: Interviewed Syrian-Armenian children highlighted that they did not have any major problems at schools. However, they complained that they could not fully follow the science classes (for example mathematic, physic and biology classes) and they added that there were differences between Syrian and Armenian curriculum. Finally, they did not see a need to learn Russian, which is taught as a second language in Armenian schools. The majority of them prefer to have French or English language classes.

There are differences between Western and Eastern Armenian language, which is also an issue for students arriving from Syria. Children understand the Eastern Armenian, however, they have difficulties with writing, pronunciation, and grammar.

Attitude: Some interviewed Syrian-Armenian children observed that they were in a privileged position at school. Teachers were less demanding and gave them better marks comparing to Armenian pupils. Some children got good marks without having appropriate knowledge. Teachers were also very understanding towards Syrian-Armenians who were not prepared for classes or were absent from school. Interviewed principals and teachers said that many displaced parents approached them and demanded better and less strict treatment of their children. They were complaining a lot about their difficult situation. However, in a long term, such misuse and misunderstanding of the positive discrimination approach could have a negative impact on Syrian-Armenian children, their level of education, and thus prospects for the future.

Box 13 - A girl's story on teachers' approach towards displaced children from Syria

An 18 year-old girl from Syrian who lives in Darbnik noticed that the teacher gave her better marks than to other students, because she was from Syria. She added that in her hometown teachers were much stricter. They demanded from pupils a lot. On the contrary, teachers in Armenia were too tolerant. Finally, she observed that this situation was also due to parents' actions. Some parents complained at schools, demanding a special treatment for their children.

4.3 Sending Children to School, Drop Outs and Out of School Children

Despite the fact that primary and secondary education is compulsory for all children in Armenia, regardless their legal status and background, some of the interviewed parents stated that they did not want to send their children to an Armenian kindergarten or school.

Box 14 - The interviewed parents on sending their children to Armenian schools and kindergartens

In Zvartnots village near Yerevan, children attend neither a school nor a kindergarten. Parents interviewed there explained that they did not send their children to a pre-school facility because the language of instruction was Armenian. They explained that it would be better to send their children to a Yezidi-speaking kindergarten.

An asylum-seeker from Iraq said that his children did not attend a pre-school facility in Armenia due to the Armenian language spoken there. He explained that he tried to find an Arabic-speaking kindergarten, but could not identify one.

There are two main issues in this respect that were identified during this assessment, i.e. the low awareness of legal requirements for mandatory elementary and secondary education and cultural/language barriers. Parents are not aware that all children, regardless their legal status, have to be sent to school and it is their obligation to guarantee that their children attend a primary and secondary school. Another identified issue concerns the language of instruction. Some interviewed parents, who do not speak Armenian, did not want to send their children to an Armenian school or kindergartens even in case a place for their children was available. Parents were afraid that their children would not be able to follow classes and they would not adapt. Their projected fear of the language barriers and difficulties their children may face prevented them to enrol children in a school or kindergarten.

There are no cultural assistants employed in schools, where non-Armenian children are present. This is why parents, who do not speak Armenian, are not able to communicate properly with teachers and the principal. There are also limited links and interactions between educational institutions and displaced parents. There is no chance for them to understand how the Armenian education system works, how their children will be assisted, and why providing children with this opportunity is crucial for their future perspective and situation. Being afraid of their children's well-being, they decide not to send their children to school or to kindergarten.

Interviewed teachers said that they were ready and willing to provide extra classes for asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced persons, including Armenian language lessons and any other extra curriculum classes, if relevant resources and opportunities are granted.

With respect to dropouts, non-enrolment and limited attendance in schools of asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced students, there are some indications for concern that should be further investigated. During this assessment, some children said that they worked after school. The majority of them were boys and they had to work to provide for their families. Another group said that they were looking for a job in restaurants or coffee shops. Those children who work usually have lower grades and are not able to participate fully in the classes. There was also a group of children that did not attend school at all, because they had to work and provide for themselves and/or their families. Finally, interviewed teachers observed an increased number of children who started 2015/16 school year, but were not attending classes for a couple of weeks or stopped attending school at all. As they explained, the majority of those children left Armenia for other countries.

Based on the questionnaires and interviews conducted within the assessment, school dropouts were not directly identified. The "2015 Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia" survey showed that for 2014 there were 214 dropouts reported for all Armenia. In Yerevan, in total, 15 cases were identified, in the majority of cases children left schools due to poor economic social conditions.⁷⁵ There is no data available on asylum seeking, refugees, and displaced children dropouts, this is why assessment of the phenomenon is not possible.

⁷⁵ National Statistical Office, *Social Snapshot...*, p. 134.

Section 5. Trauma and Mental Health Problems

Finding 4: *Most displaced children were exposed to a traumatic event in the country of origin, upon their journey, and after arrival in Armenia, but have not been offered much support to overcome the trauma either by families or by professionals.*

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

Pre-migration and journey experience has a great influence on children's well-being. In the country of origin, children can witness torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence against their relatives and friends, but also they can themselves be survivors of torture and violence. Eventually, in the country of refuge, asylum-seekers, and refugees, both adults and children, often suffer from stress and anxiety, and they feel disoriented and isolated.⁷⁶ International research studies have found that "rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can range from 20-40 percent, and anxiety and depression rates can vary from 30-70 percent within the population sector."⁷⁷ It is estimated that from 5 to 35 % of refugees are survivors of torture.⁷⁸

5.1. Causes of Trauma and Psychological Distress in the Country of Origin and in Armenia

The main groups of displaced persons arriving in Armenia came from war zones and hostile environments, where they suffered indiscriminate violence, but also were targets of ill-treatment and violence. For example, the civilian population in Syria and Iraq is often attacked by militias and armed groups. They also suffer from indiscriminate violence, bombing, and shelling.⁷⁹ This has an impact on children's mental and physical health. "As a result of repeated exposure to violence and insecurity, children throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, are exhibiting symptoms of trauma, including psychological and behavioural disorders, as well as post-traumatic stress."⁸⁰

One of the major components of interviews, drawing exercises, and questionnaires conducted with displaced persons concerned trauma, PTSD⁸¹, and psychological problems. Based on the

⁷⁶ International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, *Recognising Victims of Torture in National Asylum Procedures*, 2013, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See for example: reports published by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and UNAMI and OHCHR, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 May – 31 October 2015*, available at http://www.uniraq.org/images/humanrights/UNAMI-OHCHR_%20POC%20Report_FINAL_01%20May-31%20October%202015_FINAL_11Jan2016.pdf (accessed 27 March 2016).

⁸⁰ Para 80, 10th Report of Commission of Inquiry on Syria, (A/HRC/30/48), 13 August 2015 (published on 3 September 2015), available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/ICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx> (accessed 10 March 2016).

⁸¹ PTSD "includes symptoms of distressing re-experiences of the events, sensory encoding of the events, conscious and unconscious avoidance of memories of the event, irritability, poor concentration and other symptoms of hyper-arousal. (...) Those who have suffered traumatic events often display avoidance symptoms; that is, they avoid thinking and talking about the event" (UNHCR, *Beyond proof. Credibility Assessment in EU asylum system*, 2013, pp. 61-62). PTSD is an anxiety disorder, triggered by an exposure to serious injury, violence or actual or threatened death. Learning about someone close or a relative who experienced trauma could also lead to PTSD. "The disturbance, regardless of its trigger, causes clinically significant distress or impairment in the individual's social interactions, capacity to work or other important areas of functioning. It is

information collated, displaced children in Armenia suffer multiple traumas related to the traumatic experience in the country of origin and upon a journey to the country of refuge. Children alongside with adults are also exposed to trauma after arrival in Armenia based on the experience of poverty and, in some cases, violence and difficult family situation.

Displaced persons who experienced traumatic disorder may react to a trigger in different ways. Dissociation, indifference, laughing, smiling, being silent, crying or being aggressive and anxious, are just some of the observed reactions to remembering, talking, or recalling traumatic experience or memory.⁸² Some of these reactions were also observed during individual interviews with children and adults. At least six parents were emotional, anxious and cried when they spoke about the pre-migration experience and current situation of their children, but also when they explained their family situation and separation with other family members.

The majority of children approached for the purpose of this assessment were exposed to a traumatic event in the country of origin, upon their journey, and after arrival in Armenia. Syrian-Armenian displaced children between 6 and 12 years witnessed war, guns, tanks, shelling, and bombardments. Those children who remember their hometowns recalled disturbing memories, injuries, explosions, and destroyed buildings, including their homes. They underlined fear, anxiety, sadness they had felt in Syria. Often children referred to their parents who were sad, worried and disturbed. They also recalled their journey to Armenia: buses and cars being stopped by masked and unknown men/militias, bribes being paid to pass, some family members who were not allowed to pass and, thus, had to return home.

Box 15 - Stories and experience shared by interviewed children (cases of PTSD and trauma)

A girl from Syria said that when she was sitting in the balcony in her home in Aleppo she saw a red dot of a sniper rifle on her face. Then, when she was travelling in Syria, a bus was stopped by militia. The militias tried to drag her out of the bus and they let her go only after being bribed by another passenger. These memories triggered serious anxiety and emotions. The girl said that there was no professional psychological assistance available to her and she could not talk about her experience with anyone.

A Syrian boy from Aleppo underlined that he and his family suffered and survived heavy shelling and bombardment of the city. After arrival at the Lebanese border, his mother was stopped and sent back to Syria. He had to bribe an officer at the border to enter the country. He was 16 at that time.

An 8 year-old boy from Syria drew a burning house with persons inside. He portrayed his family in a fast moving car with a weapon attached to it. The picture shows a high level of anxiety, aggression, and stress.⁸³

A 21 year-old male said that he was injured by shelling and since then he has had respiratory problems despite two surgeries performed. In 2012, he arrived in Armenia and now lives with his parents in a rented apartment.

not the physiological result of another medical condition, medication, drugs or alcohol." (American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5 Fact Sheet on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, available at: <http://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/dsm-5> (accessed 6 March 2016)).

⁸² UNHCR, *Beyond proof....*, pp. 62-63.

⁸³ See Annex 8 - drawing No. 5.

Displaced children in Armenia are also exposed to post-arrival traumatic events related to conflicts between their parents and difficult family situations. The majority of interviewed children said that they missed their family members who had to stay in Syria. Some added that their mothers, fathers, siblings are abroad, for example, in Turkey or the Gulf States. As it was already mentioned, they said that they were abandoned twice. It first happened in Syria, when they had to leave their grandparents, parents, relatives and friends behind, and then in Armenia, when their relatives had to leave Armenia for other countries.

Many children, who were asked to draw their families, did it in a way indicating depressive mood, insecurity, and anxiety. They portrayed persons as small figures and did not use details on their drawings. Children often draw a ground for characters to stand on, placing them in the upper part of a drawing and portraying themselves the last. This also indicates that they have had traumatic experiences.

The interviewed children said that they did not have anyone close to talk to. Parents are too busy with their own problems, struggling with a difficult economic situation, and having experience of traumatic events, PTSD, and other health problems. There is no one children can approach to talk to or share their problems and fears. Parents, however, play a significant role in the diagnosis of PTSD and psychological problems of their children. Some children did not want to get into details and tried to avoid speaking of their experience, which shows that there is a need for a psychologist to work with them to improve their psychological condition.

5.2 Possible Re-traumatisation of Children during Refugee Status Determination Procedure

The majority of applications for refugee status are lodged by the head of the family, usually a man, who is claiming asylum. According to Article 51(1) of the amended Law on Refugees and Asylum in such cases, all adult family members shall be entitled to an interview. This is why accompanied children do not actively take part in RSDP. Finally, based on the principle of family unity, dependents should be granted the same status as the head (the principal applicant).⁸⁴

Box 16 - Good practice. Procedural guarantees for vulnerable asylum-seekers

The amended Law on Asylum and Refugees introduced several guarantees for applicants. Article 50 introduces a list of guarantees for vulnerable applicants. A special case manager is appointed to carry out all proceedings of an asylum-seeker with special needs. Finally, according to Article 51(7), an applicant may ask a male or a female case manager to conduct an interview. The same with an interpreter. Finally, at the SMS premises, there is a designated room, where all interviews take place. Privacy and intimacy are guaranteed, and the room is equipped to carry out interviews with asylum-seekers.

In practice, it may occur that children may be present during the interviews of their parents scheduled at the SMS premises. In general, there are two meetings scheduled. The initial one, when a formal request for international protection is lodged, and the second, during which a detailed story of an applicant and his/her reasons for applying for refugee status are being

⁸⁴ Par 184, *UNHCR's Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status*.

discussed. However, children should not be present during adults' interviews and should stay outside the room. This is to prevent traumatisation and/or re-traumatisation of a child. Usually, the stories, facts, and information mentioned during interviews are not child-appropriate. Child's exposure to traumatic stories of their parents and relatives may lead to secondary traumatic stress.⁸⁵ This is why children should not be present during interviews and discussions with adult asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons.

⁸⁵ Secondary traumatic stress is a reaction of children to indirect exposure to traumatic events suffered by their parents. More information see the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's web-page: <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/secondary-traumatic-stress> (accessed 8 March 2016).

Section 6. Violence Against Asylum Seeking, Refugee, and Displaced children

Finding 5: *There is no comprehensive data available on domestic and sexual violence among displaced population. There appears to be underreporting due to cultural stereotypes both in Armenia and in countries/communities of origin as well as low awareness of different types of sexual and gender-based violence, such as psychological, social violence or harmful traditional practices among the displaced. With respect to minority (ethnic, religious, etc.) mistreatment, the relevant group may perceive some instances of abuse or bullying, which are not reported to the police nonetheless.*

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

International research shows that asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons are vulnerable to various types of violence, maltreatment, and exploitation in the country of refuge. This is mainly due to their difficult situation, limited knowledge of their rights, disorientation, and baggage of experience from the country of origin. Trauma, fear, depression, and a feeling of loneliness and lost may fuel anxiety and aggression. Children, women, and elderly persons are among those, who are the most vulnerable to SGBV.⁸⁶

Acts of sexual and gender-based violence are grouped into five categories: sexual violence, physical violence, emotional and psychological violence, harmful traditional practices, and socio-economic violence.⁸⁷ SGBV cannot be only associated with sexual and physical violence, such as rape or beating. There are several types of emotional and psychological violence, such as humiliation, insulting, non-sexual verbal abuse or denying basic expenses for family survival. Arranged marriage under the age of legal consent is considered to be a harmful traditional practice. Discriminatory practices or psychological and physical harm to LGBTI persons also meet the criteria of SGBV.⁸⁸

Several risks may trigger SGBV. For example, limited access to services, poverty, inadequate housing or trauma, stress, mental, and physical health,⁸⁹ all may lead to sexual and domestic violence. Even though women and girls remain the main group vulnerable to gender-based violence, the situation of men and boys should also be considered. Often they are ashamed to disclose their experience. International research shows that males and boys are often not considered a group, which could be subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. This is why medical personnel, social workers and other service providers are not prepared to respond to the potential needs of male victims of sexual and gender-based violence.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ See for example: UNHCR, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons. Guidelines for Prevention and Response*, 2003.

⁸⁷ UNHCR, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees...*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 16-18.

⁸⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, 2008, pp. 67-68.

⁹⁰ Ch. Dolan, *Into the mainstream: addressing sexual violence against men and boys in conflict. A briefing paper prepared for the workshop held at the Overseas Development Institute, London, 14 May 2014*, p. 4.

6.1 Sexual and Gender-based Violence

During this assessment, SGBV cases were not directly identified based on the interviews with adults and children. There is no comprehensive data available on domestic and sexual violence among displaced population. Only the ARCS, which provides assistance to SGBV survivors, collates information about cases that the organisation is dealing with. According to the available statistics provided by the ARCS for 2015 and January 2016, 12 SGBV cases, including domestic violence, rape and FGM, were responded to.⁹¹ The majority of these cases concerned women. Rape and FGM-related cases occurred in the country of origin. Other cases, in particular, those related to domestic violence, happened after women's arrival in Armenia. Gender based violence, due to social norms and responsiveness of the protection system, tends to be underreported both in countries/communities of origin and in Armenia.

Box 17 - Good Practice. Assistance to SGBV Survivors

Within funding from UNHCR, the ARCS runs a special project in order to ensure appropriate response and referral to survivors of SGBV among displaced persons. Survivors who approach, or are referred to the organisation, are provided with psychological assistance and counselling, and the ARCS project officer oversees case management, ensuring referral to legal aid, appropriate shelter, security, and medical response where relevant. The ARCS also cooperates and assists the SMS with the SGBV cases. There are monthly and yearly statistics collated, all cases are summarised, and there is information on the type of assistance provided.

The HRC noticed that the level of domestic violence and violence against women in Armenia is high.⁹² "[T]he society is built on a clear-cut ideas concerning the distribution of the roles of women and men in the family."⁹³ According to the public opinion poll conducted for the OSCE office in Yerevan, knowledge on non-physical forms of domestic violence is very limited. For example, only less than 4% of respondents consider economic violence a problem.⁹⁴ In 2015, the Armenian Police registered 784 domestic violence cases countrywide.⁹⁵ There were 16 cases of domestic violence against children and 83 cases concerning sexual abuse against children registered during the same year.⁹⁶ It seems, however, that many cases are underreported. According to the data of the Armenian National Coalition for Child Protection, in 2013 assistance was provided to 504 cases of psychological abuse and 255 cases of physical abuse against children.⁹⁷ Moreover, almost 42% of victims of domestic violence did not report on those cases, because they did not want their relative to be charged with a criminal offence.⁹⁸ According to the interviewed stakeholders, domestic and sexual violence is considered a private matter that has to be dealt with within the family. Some interlocutors even

⁹¹ Data provided by the Red Cross Armenia (29 February 2016).

⁹² Para 8, Human Rights Committee (HRC), *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant, Concluding observations adopted by the Human Rights Committee at its 105th session*, 9-27 July 2012.

⁹³ Para. 45, *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Police-Public Partnership, *Domestic Violence Survey in the Republic of Armenia*, 2011, p. 5, available at: <http://www.osce.org/yerevan/88229?download=true> (accessed 27 March 2016).

⁹⁵ Similar number comparing previous years.

⁹⁶ Data provided by the Armenian Police (26 February 2016).

⁹⁷ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on her visit to Armenia*, A/HRC/31/58/Add.2, 1 February 2016, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/015/78/PDF/G1601578.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 9 March 2016).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

highlighted that the Armenian society valued family traditions, thus, domestic and sexual violence was not an issue. They also confirmed that awareness on domestic violence and SGBV is rather limited. HRC advised enhancing awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality, gender stereotypes and criminalisation of domestic violence.⁹⁹

Taking into account the Armenian context, analysing the phenomenon of domestic violence and violence against displaced children is difficult. There is no comprehensive information available on gender and country of origin on victims and perpetrators of all reported crimes. Data collated by the ARCS concerns only those persons who approached them or were identified by the SMS or other actors and referred to the organisation.

Some children interviewed for this assessment highlighted unpleasant situations they witnessed or experienced at home. They described cases of fights between parents, shouting, and corporal punishment they suffered. However, sexual violence and exploitation were not reported. As mentioned above, trauma, the experience of displacement, depression may trigger violence and aggression against children and adults.

Box 18 - Children's stories about violent relations between parents

An 8 year-old boy said that he felt bad when his father was shouting at his mother. His parents often had fights and he was sad when he had to witness that.

A 6 year-old girl said that her mother and father argued a lot and got angry quite often. She added that both parents were sad after these quarrels. Finally, she mentioned that she and her sister were taking sides with one of them supported the mother, while the other taking the father's side.

Sexual violence was not reported based on the analysis of drawings of young children, but there is a need for a separate research dedicated to this issue. Also, child prostitution among displaced persons, in particular, children, has to be further researched and assessed. A report of one individual case of a refugee child who was sexually exploited in Armenia was shared. A recent report on the visit to Armenia of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography notes that "[a]lthough the official statistics indicate that there have been relatively few cases of the sale and sexual exploitation of children in Armenia, (...) the exact scope of the phenomena is difficult to determine owing to the gaps in legislation, awareness-raising and education, the lack of child-friendly reporting and complaint mechanisms, and the insufficient specialized training of the professionals who deal with child victims."¹⁰⁰

There is a need for a cooperation and information-sharing between social workers, psychologists, law enforcement officers, teachers and community leaders to identify this kind of cases. Currently, such a holistic identification, prevention and referral system is not in place in Armenia due to limited awareness of the phenomenon.

⁹⁹ Para 7 and 8, HRC, *Consideration of reports submitted...*

¹⁰⁰ Para 68, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children...*

6.2 Racially Motivated Violence and Bullying

There are not many African asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants in Armenia. However, those who were interviewed¹⁰¹ within this assessment said that the Armenian society was not open, they were abused, discriminated against and did not feel accepted. They pointed out to cases of people laughing at them and verbally abusing them. Asylum-seekers and refugees do not report these cases to the Police, as they think that it will change nothing. In 2012, the HRC encouraged Armenia "to strengthen its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the laws adopted to combat racial discrimination and to ensure the achievement of their objectives."¹⁰²

Box 19 - An African girl's story on her family and her experience in a kindergarten

A 6 year-old girl from Africa, when asked to portray her family at first did not draw a family at all. When asked to do that, she drew separated parents and an imaginary sister and pets. Neither of them had mouths. This drawing of imaginary characters showed that the girl had unmet demand for affiliation. She was complaining about the kindergarten where children made fun of the colour of her skin. On several occasions, she was beaten up.¹⁰³ Her mother confirmed these stories. She added that children are not playing with her and on several occasions her daughter asked why she was black. She also added that people were staring at her on the streets and called her bad words.

Interviewed Syrian-Armenian children stated that they are generally welcomed by the society and they have not encountered any unpleasant situation and have felt safe on the streets. A girl from Syria mentioned that other children were laughing at her, because of her name, which was unusual for Armenian children. Another girl complained that she was asked about her religion, namely, if she was a Muslim. This could be directly related to different events in other parts of the world, and in general, negative stereotypes about Muslims. This, however, without an in-depth study on the attitudes of the Armenian society towards Muslims, cannot be assessed yet as a worrying trend. Finally, children coming from Syria and Iraq do belly dancing, which is considered as inappropriate in Armenia and a reason for bullying. Some children reported bullying at schools and neighbours. A detailed information about these cases was not gathered. Children did not elaborate much on these problems. They did not understand why this happened and they were ashamed when talking about it.

¹⁰¹ In total two adults and one child were interviewed.

¹⁰² Para 6, HRC, *Consideration of reports submitted...*

¹⁰³ Annex 8 - drawing No. 4.

Section 7. Separated and Unaccompanied Children and Children in RCAS

Finding 6: *While there are not many children who were identified as separated or unaccompanied in Armenia, it is partially due to low professional understanding of the issue and lack of systemic approach needed for identification of such cases. The current system for identification, protection, and reception of unaccompanied and separated children in Armenia requires additional improvements. Despite the existing relevant legal regulation of the issue, its enforcement remains faulty and in need of improvement. The child protection system in Armenia is not fully equipped to deal with these children. There is a need for a set of alternative arrangements such as foster care (or placing a child in a special institution where proper care is provided) for accommodating unaccompanied or separated children as an alternative to RCAS.*

Citation of International Experience or Best Practice

- The situation of unaccompanied and separated children is particularly fragile in the country of refuge. In the General Comment No. 6, the CRC observed that these children "face greater risks of inter alia sexual exploitation and abuse, military recruitment, child labour (including for their foster families) and detention. They are often discriminated against and denied access to food, shelter, housing, health services and education. Unaccompanied and separated girls are at a particular risk of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. In some situations such children have no access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, age assessment, documentation, family tracing, guardianship systems or legal advice."¹⁰⁴
- The Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children¹⁰⁵ provide a definition of a separated and unaccompanied child. The first group "are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members." On the other hand, unaccompanied children are "separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so."¹⁰⁶ Under international law and policy, the states have certain obligations to all children within their jurisdiction. The best interest of the child together with the principles of non-discrimination, participation, development and evolving capacities should apply to all actions and potential actions undertaken by all relevant authorities. This also concerns displaced unaccompanied and separated children.
- State obligations towards unaccompanied and separated children start at the border when a child attempts to enter the country's territory.¹⁰⁷ These obligations concern all other possible stages, including RSDP, reception and eventually integration. They

¹⁰⁴ Para 3, CRC, General Comment No. 6 (2005). *Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin*.

¹⁰⁵ The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, available at: http://www.unicef.org/protection/IAG_UASCs.pdf (accessed 10 March 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Para 12, CRC, General Comment No. 6...

apply not only to all authorities, but also to non-governmental and international organisations involved.¹⁰⁸

States are obliged to appoint a guardian for a separated or unaccompanied child who "should be consulted and informed regarding all actions taken in relation to the child (...), have the authority to be present in all planning and decision-making processes, including immigration and appeal hearings, care arrangements and all efforts to search for a durable solution."¹⁰⁹ A guardian safeguards legal, social, psychological, health, material and educational needs of the child.¹¹⁰ This is why she or he has to be appointed as early as possible after child's arrival, or when a child is identified as separated or unaccompanied. This is to guarantee that the best interest of the child is respected during all stages of a displacement or migration circle.¹¹¹

7.1 Unaccompanied Children

In the past six years, there only one case of an unaccompanied displaced child who sought asylum in Armenia was identified. However, this one case has shown a limitation of the current procedural and reception system for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Armenia. Neither a guardian nor a legal representative was appointed for the boy. The asylum interview was scheduled and carried out without the presence of either of these two persons. The whole procedure violated international law and standards, and was not compatible with the national legislation. At that time, the Law on Refugees and Asylum, in Article 47(8) and in relation to Article 41, provided that a guardian or a custodian should be appointed by a Guardianship Body with the assistance of the SMS. There were also several guarantees listed in Article 50 related to the procedural and reception issues that were not followed. The shadowed text below presents the respective legal analysis.

Recent amendments to the Law on Refugees and Asylum, which entered into force as of 9 January 2016, have introduced a new approach to unaccompanied and separated children. First of all, a group of vulnerable applicants, among them children, survivors of torture or disabled persons, are provided with special assistance and procedural guarantees. Amended Article 8(1) (sub-clauses 1 and 2) provide a definition of an unaccompanied and separated child, while Articles 8(3) and 8(4) require that all involved institutions provide assistance regarding accommodation and "provision of care". Finally, the best interest of the child and the special situation of a child should be taken into account and followed by these actors.

In regard to the reception of unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking child, s/he should be placed in the RCAS "on a priority basis," taking into account the best interest of the child

¹⁰⁸ Para 13, Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Para 33, CRC, *General Comment No. 6...*

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Para 19, *ibid.* Determining a child's best interest requires conducting a comprehensive assessment and gathering information on the child's identity, nationality, ethnic and cultural background, languages spoken and understood, health conditions and trauma, and reception and protection needs. This assessment should be done in a friendly atmosphere, taking into account child's development and maturity, but also carried out by a professional sensitised to the child's rights and trained to interview children (Para 20, *ibid.*).

and in consultation with a "representative".¹¹² A guardian or a custodian should be appointed within seven working days after a motion from the SMS has been received by the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues or Family, Women and Children Rights Protection Unit.¹¹³ Finally, according to the recent changes a legal representative for an unaccompanied or separated child has to be appointed for the duration of the procedure. The representative, according to Article 50(3), is responsible for representing the best interest of the child. Under Article 50(7) s/he has to be present during an interview. Any proceedings cannot be initiated without his/her "involvement".

Article 50 of the amended Law on refugees and asylum introduces several guarantees for asylum-seekers with special needs including separated and unaccompanied children. According to Article 50(1), "the authorised bodies" are responsible for identifying vulnerable applicants "within the shortest possible period upon registration of the asylum procedure". Moreover, Article 50(5) provides that the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues in cooperation with a Family, Women and Child Protection Unit "initiates the process of placement" of a child in an alternative care system if "it is not appropriate to place" him/her in the RCAS. This has to be done in consultation with a legal representative. An interview has to be conducted within two weeks after a legal representative is appointed (Article 50(7)). "All officials involved in the asylum procedure" have to follow the principle "of protection of the interests of the child". A special case manager has to carry out cases of vulnerable applicants (Article 50(12)). An applicant may be represented by an advocate of his/her choice. An interview may be conducted by a case manager of the same sex. Finally, according to Article 52.1(6) the accelerated procedure for granting refugee status does not apply to vulnerable applicants including unaccompanied and separated children.

The recent amendments introduced to the Law on Refugees and Asylum are progressive in terms of protection and guarantees offered to vulnerable asylum-seekers and contain a number of favourable provisions, including: appointing a special case manager, procedural guarantees, exceptions from the accelerated procedure, appointing a legal representative, and guaranteeing access to interpreters and case managers, who are trained to deal with vulnerable applicants. Despite all these changes, existing procedures related to unaccompanied and separated children are too complicated and do not follow the international standards.¹¹⁴

The current system for identification, protection, and reception of unaccompanied and separated children in Armenia requires additional changes. The most important issues are to identify all relevant actors and distribute tasks and responsibilities among them. There is a gap between the first phase, which is the arrival in Armenia at the border, and the subsequent phases, i.e. RSD, reception, and integration. This is why the BT and PVO have to be engaged in the identification of vulnerable applicants, among them, separated and unaccompanied children, and be ready to refer them to specialised bodies. There are also other actors, such as non-governmental organisations, that should be included in this system.

¹¹² Amended Article 24(1) of the Law on Refugees and asylum.

¹¹³ Amended Article 41.1 of the Law on Refugees and asylum.

¹¹⁴ See Annex 9 for a list of elements required to draft guidelines on unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking children.

7.2 Separated Children

During the interviews conducted for the purpose of this assessment, potential cases of separated children were identified. However, there is no official information on the number of separated asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia.

Following international standards "[a]t ports of entry immigration authorities should put in place procedures to identify separated children and to refer such children to the appropriate child welfare authorities. Where an adult accompanies children, it will be necessary to establish the nature of the relationship between the child and adult."¹¹⁵ At least four interviewed children during this assessment either crossed the Armenian border with an adult, who was not their parent, crossed the border with an adult, who was not their relative, or crossed the border without any adult accompanying them.

Based on the analysis of information gathered during the interviews with children and stakeholders, the procedure for identifying separated children at the border checkpoint requires further improvements. Officers working at the border checkpoints for the BT and PVD should be sensitised on the phenomenon and be trained on the identification of separated children. Usually, many children enter a country without being identified as separated.¹¹⁶ This is why border guards and other officers, present at the border, should be cautious when it comes to children entering to or departing from the country.

Another group that has to be taken into account are children who were separated from their parents after their arrival in the country. This could be, in particular, relevant to the Armenian context. As it has been already mentioned, mostly due to economic reasons, parents of Syrian-Armenians and other displaced groups decide to leave Armenia for work. A child usually stays with grandparents or so-called informal guardians i.e. adults who take care of him/her. According to international standards in such cases "[i]mmigration and refugee determination authorities should ensure that any change of status resulting from that separation is reflected in their procedures."¹¹⁷ The best interest of the child has to be respected during all stages of displacement or migration circle, i.e. upon arrival, reception, integration and departure. This requires guaranteeing that a child has a legal representative or guardian, as soon as is identified as separated (or unaccompanied).

Based on the interviews conducted and analysis of available information, stakeholders, including the SMS, PVD, and NGOs, are not enough sensitised and trained to identify a separated child. Even though a child is living in a family, for example, with an uncle or aunt, or grandparents, who are not formally appointed as guardians or custodians, there is no identification system in place to appoint a formal guardian or custodian. It is in the best interest of a child to have a formal guardian or a custodian appointed in case of absence of parents. There is a role for social workers, lawyers, law enforcement officers and other persons, who

¹¹⁵ Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice*, 2010, 4th Revised Edition, p.15, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/415450694.html> (accessed 10 March 2016).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

can come in contact with a separated (or unaccompanied) child to be aware of related protection risks. However, this is not in place.

7.3 Guardianship, Custodianship and Alternative care

According to the current system in Armenia, in the case of unaccompanied or separated asylum-seeking children, the SMS is a designated body to carry out the interview and initiate the guardian (custodian) appointing procedure. The SMS lodges a motion to the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues or a Family, Women and Children's Rights Protection Unit to appoint a guardian or custodian to an unaccompanied or separated child. These institutions, however, pass the motion to the Guardianship and Trusteeship Committee.¹¹⁸ Only the latter body is formally able to appoint a guardian or custodian. The Guardianship and Trusteeship Committee works at a community level and is responsible for supporting the rights and the best interest of unaccompanied or separated children.¹¹⁹ The Committee is responsible for appointing a custodian or guardian for a child within 30 days after it is "aware of the necessity of establishment of guardianship".¹²⁰

Under the Armenian law, there is a difference between a guardian and a custodian. According to the Civil Code, the first could only be appointed for a child younger than 14 years old, and the second for a child between 14 and 18 years of age.¹²¹ This may create a challenge if the age of a separated or undocumented child is unknown, i.e. it is not known if a child is older than 14 or not. Current Armenian law, namely the Civil Code and the Law on Refugees and Asylum, does not address the situation when the age of a separated or unaccompanied child is unknown or disputed. In particular, if a child is younger or older than 14 years.

However, international standards require conducting an age assessment procedure only if a child's age is disputed and only in the best interest of the child.¹²² What is crucial is that children "should have a guardian appointed to support them through the age assessment procedure".¹²³ Besides that, a guardian (or custodian) should be responsible for guaranteeing that all procedural, legal and reception conditions are in line with the best interest of the child. Moreover, according to international standards, an individual, in order to carry out the role of a guardian "should have relevant childcare expertise and an understanding of the special and cultural needs of separated children."¹²⁴ Finally, when guardianship is arranged, child's views should also be taken into account.¹²⁵

However, the Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees, which are engaged in the process of appointment of a guardian or custodian under the current law and monitoring of the best interest of the child (including asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children situations), are predominantly considered to have low professional skills. These bodies face difficulties in

¹¹⁸ Article 34(1)(8) and Article 41.1 of the Law on refugees and asylum.

¹¹⁹ Decree on enactment of charter for custody and guardianship authorities, 22 June 2006.

¹²⁰ Article 37(1) of the Civil Code

¹²¹ Articles 34 and 35 of the Civil Code.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. p.10.

¹²⁴ Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice...*, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Para 25, CRC, *General Comment No. 6*

identifying separated children or children without proper parental care.¹²⁶ This also concerns the decision-making process, which does not include "any in-depth analysis or further control."¹²⁷

Box 20 - Child protection system reform in Armenia

There is a three-tier child protection system in Armenia. The National Committee on Protection of Children is the highest body responsible for policy and coordination. At the regional level (and in Yerevan) Family, Women, and Child Protection Units were set up to implement policy, including the policy on protection of children. Finally, at the local/community level, the Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees make a decision on individual cases.

Recently Armenian government introduced deinstitutionalisation reform with the aim to offer professional, alternative family-based care services to children in difficult life situations. Under the new Foster Care Strategy¹²⁸, several types of foster care were introduced. These are general, professional, emergency and holiday foster care. Following the provisions of the Family Code, only Armenian citizens may become foster parents. Moreover, the age difference between a child and a potential parent should not be higher than 18 years. Emergency foster care is provided in case of parents who have health problems, if this is in the best interest of the child, in the case of imprisonment and arrest, or if a parent is unable to take care of a child concerned.

The Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees are responsible for supervising foster families and provide them with knowledge and skills. They are also conducting home visits, organise meetings, and assess overall conditions and performance of foster parents. Foster families should be provided with financial support. The payment for taking care for one child is equal to the minimum wage in Armenia.¹²⁹

The foster care that can serve as an alternative to the guardianship and custodianship system is currently under development in Armenia. It is an alternative solution in which unaccompanied and separated children could be provided with alternative care and protection services. According to Article 137(1) of the Family Code, an agreement is signed between the Guardianship and Trusteeship Committee and a foster family. A foster parent could only be an Armenian citizen *inter alia* with an income meeting the minimal living requirement for a child.¹³⁰ According to Article 138(3), a foster parent automatically obtains the rights and obligations of a guardian. However, experts on the rights of the child underline that the system was not ready to accommodate the needs of unaccompanied and separated non-Armenian children. Moreover, the major challenge is the fact that foster families, except for financial assistance,¹³¹ are not supported by the state. There is no monitoring in place to assess the situation of a child, no support in terms of additional training or knowledge sharing opportunities. In the case of displaced children, it is crucial that foster parents have special skills.¹³² Introducing foster

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 21.

¹²⁸ Foster Care Strategy, approved on March 10, 2016, N 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 21.

¹³⁰ Article 138(1) of the Family Code.

¹³¹ Article 140(1) of the Family Code.

¹³² Ideal candidates for foster parents should have migration or refugee experience and, if possible, a similar cultural and language background. They also should receive special trainings on relevant procedures, law and challenges related to displaced children, including PTSD, trauma and health related issues.

care for unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking children requires further changes in the Law on Refugees and Asylum since the current law does not explicitly mention this alternative and does not refer to competences for the appointment of foster families to unaccompanied and separated children. Nevertheless, the new strategy on foster care¹³³ focuses not only on children deprived of parental care, but all categories of children in difficult life circumstances.

Box 21 - Integrated Social Services (ISS) system in Armenia

Since March 2013, Armenian introduced a system of ISS. Almost 500 persons are working in Territorial Office for Social Services and are mandated by law to identify families in need of support and assistance. They are developing programmes based on the clients' individual needs.

Case managers, together with a Guardianship and Trusteeship Commission and Family, Women and Child Protection Unit, will be involved in the process of appointing a guardian or custodian to a child.¹³⁴

Syrian-Armenians are of particular concern to the ISS. They get humanitarian aid, food packages, and stationary distributed around Armenian bank holidays.

7.4 Reception and Accommodation in RCAS

According to international standards and guidelines, the states are obliged to provide a separated or unaccompanied child with proper reception, as soon as possible, after arrival or identification. A careful assessment of the child's needs has to be carried out and there are several conditions that have to be taken into account:

- child's health, mental condition, culture, gender, the language should serve as the main guidance for determining the child's reception needs in terms of reception;
- siblings should be kept together if this is in the best interest of the child;
- reviews of care arrangements should be in place;
- child over 16 years of age is not an adult, and thus should not be treated as one, and¹³⁵
- the child should not be placed in a detention centre for migration reasons at any time during displacement or migration circle.¹³⁶

According to Article 24(1) of the Law on Refugees and Asylum, a separated or unaccompanied child should be placed in the RCAS and this is done on a priority basis. However, as discussed further on, this centre is not a suitable place for children and, in particular, for separated and unaccompanied children. Mainly because there are adults accommodated there and there is no 24/7 care provided. Consequently, the best interest and well-being of the child cannot be guaranteed there.

¹³³ Draft governmental decision on foster care.

¹³⁴ Draft governmental decision on foster care.

¹³⁵ Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice...*, p. 20.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 18.

As of December 2015, there were 28 persons accommodated in the RCAS¹³⁷. Among them asylum-seekers from Mali, Congo, Iran, Ukraine, and Syria. At the time of collating information for this study, there were 5 children living in the centre: a 3 month-old baby, a 2 year-old girl from Iran recognised as a stateless person, and a 7 year-old boy from Iran both with single parents, respectively mother and father. There was also a 6 year-old girl from Congo with mother and a 9 year-old boy with an Armenian passport (his mother was Ukrainian). The majority of residents of the RCAS were adults, families with adult children, and single men and women.

The RCAS is located on the first and second floor of a larger building in Nor Nork district of Yerevan. There are around 45 places available, separate bathrooms for women and men, a kitchen and a laundry room. There is also a "special room for children" and persons with disabilities. According to the procedure on accommodating asylum-seekers at the RCAS and provision of livelihood support, an applicant is referred to the RCAS by the SMS.¹³⁸ The residents are accommodated based on their sex, age, country of origin and other conditions.¹³⁹ Moreover, a "priority is given to the asylum seeker with children, taking into account the best interest of the child" and unaccompanied children.¹⁴⁰ Residents are provided with hygiene items and food packages. The latter is distributed on 3rd, 13th and 23rd day of each month.¹⁴¹

During the two visits to the RCAS and based on the interviews with residents several issues have been identified:

- Food, which is provided every two weeks, is not sufficient for adult residents' needs. Each and every resident is provided with the same food package, there is no specific food for children, toddlers and new-borns. A milk powder, milk and other products necessary for child development are not provided to young residents. As a result, parents have to rely on the charities' support or buy these products by themselves.
- Conditions of the RCAS are relatively moderate. The RCAS is not adjusted to children's needs and development. There are disputes among the residents over children's behaviour. Some residents do not want to hear children running and playing around. The common space and rooms are not getting appropriate heating, which may influence children's health and well-being.
- Activities for children are not offered and provided. Even though there is a child-friendly room, in practice, the room is closed and not accessible for the younger ones. There is no one to take care of children while they are in the room and this is parents' obligation to do. All children living in the TAC spend their free time sitting in their rooms. They do not go outside, in particular, in winter.
- Access to school and kindergarten is very limited. Only one child living in the TAC is enrolled in a pre-school facility (for more see access to education).

NGOs and UNHCR have full access to the RCAS. There is also UNICEF child psychologist visiting the centre. However, there is lack of projects and activities dedicated to children. There

¹³⁷ Data as of 11 December 2015, provided by the SMS.

¹³⁸ *Procedure on accommodating asylum seekers in the Republic of Armenia at the Temporary Accommodation Centre and livelihood support*, December 2013, par 4.2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* par 4.12.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* par 5.4.

is also a need for a properly operating child-friendly space. The current one does not meet the required criteria. It is rarely heated, requires refurbishment and additional furniture. Finally, there is a need for a volunteer or teacher who could sit with children after school or kindergarten to help them with homework, provide additional language classes and just play with them. This is of particular importance taking into account the situation of children living in the TAC and the situation of their parents (in particular single parents). This situation was portrayed by a 7 year-old boy, whose drawing showed a denial of reality and affiliation issues. The boy presented himself as an alien, with one eye, in his own, imaginary world - a planet, where he fought with monsters and dinosaurs.¹⁴²

Given the above-described RCAS conditions and limitations, it is recommended to identify alternative arrangements for separated and unaccompanied children. There is also a need to simplify the procedure of placing a separated or unaccompanied child in a facility to guarantee proper reception conditions and safeguard the best interest of the child. Moreover, the Law on Refugees and Asylum currently prioritises institutionalised care i.e. unaccompanied or separated children should be first accommodated in the RCAS. If this is not possible, an alternative care should be explored.

Box 22 - Good practice. Alternative housing for unaccompanied and separated Armenian children

In Yerevan, the FAR Children Support Centre runs a temporary shelter for children. The shelter provides 24/7 care, medical care, and psychological assistance. All staff is trained and prepared to deal with children, in particular, with children in emergency situations.

The SOS Village Armenia runs two Short Term Placement (STP) centres in Ijevan (Tavush Province) with the total capacity of 24 places for a minimum duration of 6 months. The centres currently accommodate children in difficult life situations. Their parents are provided with professional support to regain their capability to take care for their children.¹⁴³

The following requirements have to be met before any formal arrangements are made:

- the centre has to be ready to accept unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children at any time and whenever it is needed;
- the staff working in the centre should be provided with training on asylum-seekers and displaced persons, this also includes language and culture related training;
- a formal agreement with a list of all rights and obligations has to be signed between the two parties;
- a clear and transparent procedure on placing an unaccompanied or separated child in the centre should be developed and attached to an agreement;
- the Law on refugees and asylum should be amended accordingly.

¹⁴² Annex 8 - drawing No. 3.

¹⁴³ Information provided by the SOS Children's Villages Armenia. Message dated 6 April 2016.

Section 8. Other Issues

8.1 Sexual Orientation and Gender identity

Finding 7. *Though the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia prohibits several forms of discrimination including based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity remain a taboo in Armenia. Consequently, specific information on the LGTPI displaced persons in Armenia, their situation and attitude of the society toward them is scarce and unreliable.*

The issue of sexual orientation was given particular attention in this assessment, because the assessment itself considered a number of child protection reports, among them one report of a local expert indicating possible sexual abuse and exploitation of some displaced boys.

There is no specific information available on LGBTI displaced persons in Armenia. According to the SMS¹⁴⁴, in the past 10 years there have been only two applicants claiming sexual orientation or raising an issue of an imputed sexual orientation as a reason of persecution in their countries of origin. However, one case was discontinued and in another, the application was refused. On the other hand, according to the estimates for 2015, around 50 Iraqis, Iranians, and Syrians (half of them already Armenian citizens) approached the PINK Armenia asking for legal, psychological or social assistance, personal development or looking for empowerment.¹⁴⁵ It is unknown how many recognised refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons were among those who contacted the organisation.

The interviews and questionnaires conducted with children, youth, and adults within this assessment, did not reveal any cases and detailed information related to sexual orientation and gender identity. One respondent stated that he knew fellow Syrian-Armenians, who started to express their sexual orientation after arrival in Armenia. Another highlighted the need to organise and provide children and youth with sexual education and sexual health classes.

Sexual orientation and gender identity is a taboo in Armenia, and even professionals, such as psychologists and medical doctors, often have outdated information and personal bias. The society, in general, is hostile towards LGBTI persons, while discrimination and abuse against this group remains a problem. LGBTI persons often try to hide their identity from others, including their families. The PINK Armenia, an NGO working on the sexual orientation, identity and gender-related issues, underlines that LGBTI persons are forced to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity due to threats, lack of protection from the state institutions, family rejection or fear of family rejection, isolation and restriction of their rights to freedom of expression, blackmail, societal and family pressure.¹⁴⁶ Several cases of LGBTI persons being rejected by family members were reported.¹⁴⁷

Article 14.1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia prohibits discrimination because of *inter alia* sex, race, social origin, political or any other opinion, birth, disability or other personal

¹⁴⁴ Interview with the SMS (1 February 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Data provided by the PINK Armenia. Message sent on 24 February 2016.

¹⁴⁶ PINK Armenia, *The Impact of LGBT emigration on economic indicators of Armenia*, 2015, pp. 23-33.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

or social circumstances. However, there is no anti-discrimination law in force and hate speech is not penalised. Lack of proper legislation and justice mechanism have further consequences. According to the PINK Armenia, LGBTI persons "avoid addressing their issues to state authorities and rely on the support of civil society"¹⁴⁸.

Same-sex relations are not criminalised in Armenia¹⁴⁹ contrary to the states of origin of the majority of asylum-seekers, displaced persons, and migrants who arrive in the country. Thus, LGBTI arriving in Armenia come from countries where they may feel threatened, unsafe, and suffer discrimination, harassment, persecution, and marginalisation. Consequently, they may "have been compelled to conceal and deny their identity in an effort to avoid such treatment."¹⁵⁰ They could also develop internalised homophobia and not to be able to speak about sexual or gender identity.¹⁵¹

On the other hand, one "may only have become aware of her or his sexual orientation or gender identity in the environment of the country of refuge"¹⁵². In Armenia, despite oftentimes the negative attitude of the society and lack of legal instruments to protect the rights of LGBTI persons, a different environment is created for those who had to conceal or repress their sexual orientation and gender identity in the country of origin. Consequently, asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons, including youth, may feel more open to express their identity.

The interviews with stakeholders, including state authorities, non-governmental and international organisations, showed that the awareness of the issue of sexual orientation, gender identity and displacement has to be increased. In particular, this concerns stereotypical assumption and appearances that are associated with gay men and women, characteristics or qualities typical for LGBTI persons, life experiences, and narratives. This may have a negative impact on the quality of services offered to displaced persons and on the performance of the staff providing assistance. Some needs could not be identified, while some behaviours and conduct could be misinterpreted leading to confusion, misunderstandings, and conflicts.

Comprehensive sexuality education is mandatory for primary and secondary education in Armenia and is "taught as part of a life skills-based health education programme".¹⁵³ It has to be assessed how this programme is implemented in practice. Interviewed youth reported that the issues of sexual education and sexual health are discussed neither in a family nor at schools.

¹⁴⁸ In 2014, 44 persons approached the organisation to seek protection against human rights violations based on their sexual orientation and gender. See: PINK Armenia, The Human Rights Situation of LGBT people. Annual Review. Armenia 2014, 2015, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ ILGA, The map on state homophobia is available at:

http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_WorldMap_2015_ENG.pdf (accessed 4 March 2016).

¹⁵⁰ UNHCR, *Beyond proof...*, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² ILGA, *StateSponsored Homophobia A World Survey...*, p. 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 40.

8.2. Stakeholders' Role and Involvement

Finding 8. *There is some disconnect and low level of cooperation between organizations involved in child-rights protection and support to refugees, as well other stakeholders involved in issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. There are almost no joint initiatives in response to forced migration and child's rights. These two areas seem to operate separately.*

The interviews with various stakeholders and desk reviews of published reports and analysis of a survey disseminated among NGOs and other actors showed that the awareness and knowledge of forced migration phenomenon, displacement, refugees, migrants, gender, sexual orientation, and child's rights requires improvement. There is a limited knowledge on the process and the needs of integration of displaced persons into the host society.

Box 23 - A short survey for stakeholders

A group of stakeholders (including social workers, lawyers, and local government officials) was asked to fill in an electronic survey on profiles and cases of asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children. Even though the majority of respondents did not approach or were not aware of any such case, there was a number of information collated:

- Some stakeholders said that they had a case of an unaccompanied and separated child from Syrian, Ukraine, Iran and Iraq. There were also cases of children abandoned by their parents that were identified by respondents.
- There was no case of an LGBTI person or a survivor of trafficking or smuggling identified, however, some respondents did not know and were not sure what to answer.
- Some of the stakeholders worked with traumatised children, the majority of these children were from Syria.
- Cases of child exploitation, sexual abuse, and violence, children forced into prostitution were not identified.
- Domestic violence and physical and psychological abuse against children were raised by some respondents. The majority of cases concerned Syrian-Armenians, including children younger than 6 years. Cases concerning economic violence were also raised by respondents.
- The majority of respondents either confirmed or did not know about cases of child abuse in a hospital, school or in a public place.
- A limited number of respondents were aware of a stateless child or a child having different legal status than his/her parents.
- Some children with disabilities were identified. The majority of them were from Syria.
- There were some cases identified of children having learning difficulties.
- Cases of children suffering from malnutrition were listed.
- According to respondents, there were cases of, in the majority, boys who faced difficulties in accessing/continuing education in Armenia.

Within this assessment, several meetings with child-oriented and refugee-oriented NGOs were scheduled. Based on the interviews with these NGOs and desk review analysis, the main conclusion is that these two groups often do not know each other well enough. Hence, organisations working in the field of child's rights are not aware of activities carried out by refugee-specialised NGOs and *vice versa*. There are almost no joint projects and activities in the field of forced migration and child's rights. These two areas seem to operate separately. However, several challenges related to protection of displaced children require synergy and mutual cooperation between different actors, and, in particular, between these two groups.

There is also a need for enhanced cooperation of child and refugee-oriented NGOs with organisations specialised on gender identity and sexual orientation. On the other hand, the latter actors should increase their knowledge about displacement, refugee law, and child's rights.

Box 24 - Good practice. NGOs networks in Armenia

There are two active networks of refugee and child's rights oriented NGOs in Armenia.

UNHCR together with its implementing partners has created a group of NGOs specialised in legal, social, humanitarian, and psychological assistance offered to asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons. Each partner organisation is responsible for a different type of service. There is also a reporting and information sharing system in place.

There is also a network of child-oriented NGOs supported by UNICEF. Child Protection Network Armenia (CPNA) has several member organisations working on child's rights in different parts of the country. CPNA organises meetings and trainings, prepares a commentary on policy and law on protection of child's rights. Members of CPNA implement joint projects and closely collaborate with each other.

Social service, teachers, group leaders and volunteers also play a crucial role in the system. Interviews with stakeholders showed that a holistic and integrated identification, prevention and referral system concerning vulnerable displaced persons, including children has not been developed yet. There are also several gaps in law and practice that have to be addressed.

The majority of activities and services for asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons are provided by NGOs within short-term projects. There are, for example, language classes organised for adults, cultural orientation programmes, extra sport, art and dancing classes for children. However, they are accessible only within a specific period of time. Sustainability of services offered to displaced population is not fully guaranteed. When donor-funded projects end, not all of them are sustained by the Government. At the same time, some NGOs have to focus exclusively on the projects' requirements, limitations, and criteria. That is why donors and supporting institutions should focus on financing long-term projects. This could guarantee continuity and sustainability of the services provided.

There is also a difference in services provided to Syrian-Armenians and Iraqi-Armenians. The majority of projects implemented is dedicated to the first group. The latter is aware that there is certain assistance exclusively for Syrian-Armenians. This issue was particularly raised by the interviewed Iraqi-Armenians.

Box 25 - Good Practice. The UNHCR's "Service Directory"

UNHCR has developed a referral tool called "Service Directory" available also online in 4 languages: English, Armenian, Russian and Arabic. A potential user may choose different types of assistance to learn which organisations and where provide such services. There are several criteria available, these are *inter alia*: legal assistance, medical assistance, psychological support, assistance at the border or sport, cultural and leisure activities. The webpage is updated regularly and accessed at <http://directory.unhcr.am/>.

Another challenge observed in Armenia concerns service shopping. Interviewed NGOs said that there were persons who tried to get offered services twice or more, or approached different NGOs to get the same assistance from different sources.

Chapter 3. Conclusions Including Challenges

Conclusions

This assessment identified several good practices with respect to reception, protection and treatment of refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons in Armenia pertaining both to legal, policy framework, and the practices enforced, including:

- Recent amendments of the Law on Refugees and Asylum that introduced several procedural guarantees to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees, but should be monitored strictly with respect to enforcement of those.
- Efforts by the State Migration Service to develop a Refugee Integration Strategy are currently on going though SMS has faced some delays to complete it.
- Access to the territory and citizenship (or other types of residence) for displaced persons of Armenian due to the open door policy towards this group implemented by the Armenian authorities.
- Ensured access to education due to the legal requirement for mandatory elementary and secondary education, and efforts to adjust the content of education to the needs of new arrivals, especially children of Syrian-Armenian origin.
- There are several projects in place to respond to the needs of displaced persons from Syria, who are currently residing in the country. They cover various types of issues, including language classes, psychological support, assistance on the labour market or support of self-employment.
- Cooperation among the existing networks of different stakeholders working in the field of refugee protection and child's rights protection, which, however, still needs improvements. The reforms of the ISS and the child protection system in Armenia provide additional ground for enhanced protection of child's rights and for the improvement of the situation of displaced children.

Overall, the Armenian policy towards Syrian-Armenian displaced persons should be highlighted. There are several good practices in terms of access to the territory, possibilities of admission to Armenia, access to temporary stay permits and citizenship. Despite difficult economic conditions, Armenian authorities continue applying an open and welcoming policy towards persons of Armenian background arriving from Syria, but also from Iraq and Ukraine.

Challenges

The main challenge identified during this assessment is the lack of holistic and integrated identification and referral system for displaced persons, including displaced children. While several elements of potential mechanisms already exist, they are not coordinated and integrated, and there is a limited exchange of information, knowledge, and skills between relevant actors. There is also lack of available data on displaced population in Armenia and no comprehensive statistics on asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons available *inter alia* by gender, age, and country of origin. Taking into account that a common mechanism of

gathering and exchanging relevant data among various stakeholders is not in place, analysing the phenomenon of forced migration is extremely difficult.

Other challenges revealed through this assessment include:

- Displaced persons in Armenia have various types of legal status, thus, they are entitled to a different set of rights and obligations. Even within one nuclear family, parents and children can have different legal status, for example, citizenship and a temporary stay permit.
- Due to difficult economic conditions in Armenia, displaced persons face difficulties in accessing job market and affordable housing. Limited income or unemployment could push many families below the poverty line, while some displaced children become the only source of income for the whole family since it is easier for them to find a job. Many displaced persons will be under a real risk of homelessness without support, such as rental subsidies offered by the state and NGOs. Due to this situation, many displaced persons often consider Armenia as a transit country. All these factors have a serious consequence on children's health, well-being, access to education, since parents tend to focus on their own challenges, and they are not able to dedicate their time and consideration to children.
- With respect to education, the major systematic problem for the whole country and consequently on displaced persons concerns kindergartens. Available private kindergartens are often too expensive and there are limited number of child-friendly spaces at public kindergartens. There were also challenges for non-Syrian-Armenian displaced parents to enrol their children at school, mostly related to language barriers.
- Unaccompanied and separated children are the most vulnerable among the vulnerable displaced population. This is why there is a need for a comprehensive, integrated and holistic mechanism to identify, and then provide them with proper reception conditions and procedural guarantees.
- Domestic violence is a potential issue that should be addressed by the state in cooperation with NGOs, teachers, social workers, and medical personnel. Prevention is a key element to counteract domestic and sexual violence against children. However, due to limited awareness on this issue, child abuse cases may not be properly identified in Armenia.
- Some displaced persons from Africa complained about verbal and physical violence in public places. There is also a risk of violence and ostracism against LGBTI youth. Sexual orientation and gender issues are a taboo in Armenia, and stereotypes and misconceptions of gay persons are common. Although during this assessment no LGBTI-related case was identified, some indications and analysis showed that in practice this picture could be different.
- Finally, interviewed children (and adults) have shown symptoms of trauma and PTSD. The majority of asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons in Armenia experienced war and violence in their countries of origin. Moreover, taking into account cultural shock, stress, anxiety, and limited integration opportunities, children (and adults) were exposed to traumatic events in the country of refuge.

Chapter 4. Recommendations

Recommendations included in this part are built upon the findings and conclusions resulting from this assessment. They are under the five key directions:

1. **Recommendations related to law and policy** to further enhance the Armenian standards on the protection of rights and well-being of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children. These recommendations concern various stakeholders involved in protection of child's rights in Armenia, including state authorities, NGOs, and IGOs.
2. **Recommendations related to collaboration and capacity building** to strengthen the understanding of the asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children's situation and to sensitise various stakeholders to the specific protection needs of this vulnerable group.
3. **Recommendations on awareness raising campaigns** to strengthen understating of their rights and situation in Armenia by asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children and their parents.
4. **Recommendations on integration** related to the well-being of displaced children and their situation in the host country. These recommendations provide the key elements of the state's policy that need to be enhanced to improve the situation of displaced children and their families living in Armenia.
5. **Recommendations on research, study, and evaluations** through a list of subjects that require further examination. These topics are crucial to further understand and elaborate on the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children's situation in Armenia, and thus improve the standards of protection.

1. Law and Policy

1. **The National Strategy on Protection of Children (2017-2020) should include a section on protection of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children in Armenia.**
2. **Legal framework and relevant guidelines developed should "secure proper representation of an unaccompanied or separated child's best interest"¹⁵⁴ and should follow the CRC's General Comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin.**
3. **Law on Refugees and Asylum, as well as Law on Foreigners, and relevant by-laws should be precise as to whether, and on which grounds asylum-seekers may apply for work permits and take up a job in Armenia.**
4. **Article 54 of the Law on Refugees and Asylum should be amended to enable lodging of an application for family reunification in the territory of Armenia.**
5. **A number of additional procedures and protocols should be developed including a Standard Operating Procedure on the identification and reception of unaccompanied and separated children, other procedures and guidelines related to**

¹⁵⁴ Para 33, CRC, *General Comment No. 6*

vulnerable asylum-seekers, including child protection and reception. This include, but is not limited to the following:

- A Standard Operating Procedure on the identification and reception of unaccompanied and separated children should be developed and should include a checklist and a referral system between BT and PVD, SMS and NGOs. Unaccompanied children should not be placed in RCAS. In general, adults should not be accommodated together with this group of children. The SMS should explore the possibility to place these children in a shelter, where 24/7 care is provided and the staff is trained to respond to the needs of unaccompanied and separated children. Separated children should be accommodated together with their adult caregiver(s). The best interest of the child determination should be carried out to assess if alternative care should be provided. Foster care system for unaccompanied and separated children should be further enhanced to involve asylum seeking and displaced children. Potential foster parents should be identified and trained. Ideally, they should have a refugee/migration background, speak foreign languages, and be sensitised to cultural and religious issues of potential unaccompanied and separated children. A monitoring system of foster care should be in place. UNHCR and UNICEF should facilitate the process.
 - The SMS should further develop the procedures and guidelines related to vulnerable asylum-seekers, including child protection and reception. This should include training for case managers and other staff working with asylum-seekers, as well as development of materials, and increase cooperation with international and non-governmental organisations. Best interest of the child determination procedure and related standards should be emphasized.
 - A special code of conduct for psychologists working with asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced person should be developed. It should include various elements related to ethics, quality and follow-up of the psychological care provided. Existing code of conducts, developed for other professionals could serve as a reference.
- 6. UNICEF and UNHCR should share their expertise, review, support, and facilitate further development of Armenian's law, policy, and strategies related to asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children's rights, well-being, and situation.**

2. Collaboration and Capacity Building

- 1. Collaboration between different stakeholders working with asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced persons and child protection issues should be enhanced, and a holistic child needs and abuse identification, prevention, and referral mechanism should be further developed, including:**
 - A referral system among different actors involved in providing assistance and relief to asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons should be further strengthened. The system should involve all relevant stakeholders i.e. state social services, local institutions, law enforcement officers, BT and PVD officers, social workers from NGOs,

lawyers, medical personnel, teachers, psychologists, case managers from the SMS, RCAS' staff and management. All involved actors should be sensitised on gender, violence, displacement and SGBV. The holistic and integrated system should facilitate the process of identification of traumatised, neglected, and abused asylum seeking, refugee, and displaced children. It should also facilitate the process of needs assessment and referral to relevant services. A list of tasks and roles within this system should be prepared, further enhanced and monitored.

- Any asylum seeking, refugee or displaced child should be interviewed only by trained and prepared caseworkers, social workers and lawyers. Such interviews should be conducted only if necessary. Moreover, a psychologist should be present during each and every interview with a child, in particular, if it concerns traumatic events and violence or may trigger bad memories or secondary traumatic stress.
- NGOs should develop an information sharing system to limit service shopping.
- Joint projects in the field of forced migration, child's rights, and sexual orientation and gender identity should be implemented in various settings (for example RCAS, dormitories, and social houses). These projects should focus on psychological assistance, social assistance, empowerment, awareness raising, and other relevant topics. These projects should be implemented based on a long-term vision, and sustainable and continues the approach.

2. Training on child's rights should be provided to refugee-oriented NGOs and trainings on refugee law and policy should be provided to child-oriented NGOs. NGOs and state authorities should be trained on forced migration, child's rights, PTSD, trauma, torture, SGBV, best interest determination, and sexual orientation and gender identity. These training and awareness raising campaigns should be provided to psychologists, teachers, social workers, law enforcement officers, BT and PVD officers, lawyers, interpreters, medical personnel and other actors working with asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons. Some examples of specialized trainings include:

- Training for psychologists working with displaced children to be conducted by an international expert working on PTSD, trauma and displacement. Additional training should be organised based on the existing tools such as *Psychological First Aid Training Manual for Child Practitioners*.¹⁵⁵ A specific training for teachers working with displaced children should be developed and conducted to cover the basic concepts of child protection and well-being, the meaning and importance of psychosocial support and care, child development, identification of child's behaviour, stress, and emotional distress, effective communication, working with children and parents. The training could be developed based on

¹⁵⁵ The manual is available at: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/save-children-psychological-first-aid-training-manual-child-practitioners> (accessed 6 March 2016).

UNICEF's *Teacher Training Manual on the Psycho-social Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies*.¹⁵⁶

- The BT and PVD officers, SMS workers, social services, psychologists, lawyers, law enforcement officers, and other actors should be sensitised to the issues related to separated and unaccompanied children through training and follow-up refresher sessions.
3. **The well-being of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children should be monitored to guarantee access to proper assistance and care for children in difficult life situations.** Relevant stakeholders (in particular the ISS) should identify and counteract any difficult and emergency situations. The Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees should be sensitised to the issues and problems of displaced persons and, in particular, displaced children.

3. Awareness raising

Asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons should continue to be provided with practical knowledge on issues related to their rights and social, economic and psychological issues:

- Building on earlier information-materials, UNHCR should develop new tools and new methodology (preferably a poster or an infographic) to inform asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons about their mandate and activities. This information should be presented in a short and easy way, and should include clear information available on what UNHCR can and cannot do; how UNHCR cooperates with the implementing partners as well as information on projects and activities implemented by various stakeholders (including those working on child and refugee-oriented issues). There is a need for refresher sessions and discussions organised by various stakeholders.
- The child focus package and psychological first aid package for parents should be distributed among displaced persons in Armenia. A set of awareness raising meetings should be organised to explain parents and adults what is psychological assistance and why it is important especially for children to contact and talk with a psychologist.
- Asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons should be provided with knowledge and skills related to maternity and parenting. Asylum-seeking and refugee parents should be linked up with any existing programmes and training.
- A comprehensive awareness-raising campaign on domestic violence and abuse should be prepared and launched for displaced persons. It should be tailored to a specific situation and target asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced persons. A special child-friendly campaign should be prepared for displaced children including a set of awareness-raising tools on child-abuse and child's rights for displaced children. This could include posters, info graphics,

¹⁵⁶ The toolkit is available at:

http://toolkit.inesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1064/Psychosocial_Care_and_Protection.PDF (accessed 6 March 2016).

short clips, social media groups, web public forums, page with a question and answer section, hot-lines).

- Awareness on the issue of sexual orientation, gender identity and displacement has to be increased. In particular, this concerns stereotypical assumption and appearances that are associated with gay men and women, characteristics or qualities typical for LGBTI persons, life experiences, and narratives. This may have a negative impact on the quality of services offered to displaced persons and on the performance of the staff providing assistance. Providing high-quality sexual education to children is especially relevant to displaced persons.

4. Integration

1. **Employment assistance to asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced persons should be enhanced.** These persons should continue to be provided with knowledge on the Armenian labour market and practical skills that will guide them to find a source of income, set up a business, etc.
2. **Access to education for children of concern should be monitored through meetings** with displaced parents to explain the situation of their children and the education system in Armenia. Dedicated staff should approach displaced families living in dormitories and those renting apartments on their own to explain to parents the importance of education and their obligation to send children to school. Neither separated school nor classes should be created exclusively for displaced children. This hinders integration and creates barriers between displaced (in particular Syrian-Armenian) and Armenian pupils. Children and parents should be explained why creating separate classes should be avoided and how it could influence on their children situation and well-being. Child-friendly spaces for young displaced (and Armenian) children should be created to enable their interaction with their peers. This facility should be open on weekdays for a couple of hours. Parents should also have a chance to leave their children under professional care, so that they attend vocational training, look for a job or visit a doctor. This place should also be accessible for children and persons with disabilities.
3. **Psychological assistance for asylum-seekers, refugees, and displaced persons should be further enhanced.** Additional child psychologist should be employed to provide assistance to displaced children living in the RCAS dormitories, social houses run by non-governmental organisations, and other places. A psychologist should be present in all of these places once a week. A clear information on available psychologists, their working hours and contact details to make an appointment should be displayed in the RCAS, dormitories, and other places. This information should also be distributed through other channels (such as NGOs, volunteers, schools, social media, the Internet etc.). A child focus package should be developed following the UNICEF's Child Protection Issue Brief on Psychosocial Support in Emergencies.
4. **Family reunification should be further enhanced.** In addition to legal foundations described above, a programme of microcredit and loans should be introduced to

cover the costs of travel of family members of refugees and displaced persons to Armenia. There should be a special fund available to cover the costs of travel of unaccompanied and separated children's family members to Armenia.

5. Research, Study, and Evaluations

1. **A comprehensive system of data collection on the situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children should be developed.** It should be achieved through different research tools, assessments and surveys, including:
 - A common nationwide platform for the exchange of statistical data on displaced children (and more general on displaced population) in Armenia should be developed. Different stakeholders, including state institutions and NGOs, should exchange collated information and data, with overall coordination by respective stakeholders (including statistical agencies).
2. **A needs assessment should be carried out to identify the main problems and challenges faced by asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children (and adults).**
3. **A public opinion poll on the attitudes towards asylum-seekers and refugees and displaced persons should be conducted to measure the attitudes and perceptions towards asylum-seekers and refugees, persons of different colour of skin and religion, and on Syrian-Armenians and Iraqi-Armenians living in Armenia.**
4. **A comprehensive research on domestic violence and sexual violence among displaced population should be carried out.**
5. **An in-depth nationwide research on family situation and integration with the host society of refugee and displaced families and its impact on children should be carried out.**

Chapter 5. Annexes

Annex 1. Term of Reference

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND in Armenia <u>Terms of Reference for Contractors</u>
1. Program information: UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. The UNICEF staff and experts/consultants should act in accordance with the UN Code of Conduct and UNICEF Mission.
2. Background and Context: <p>Armenia acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 1993. Armenia is also party to a number of international and regional human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The second national Law on Refugees and Asylum adopted in 2009 incorporates most of the basic principles of refugee protection enshrined in the 1951 Convention and is overall of an acceptable standard. However, there are also a number of deficiencies in the Law, including in the area of child protection.</p> <p>The refugee population in Armenia comprises of the following groups: ethnic Armenian <i>prima facie</i> refugees from Azerbaijan, refugees from Iraq and Syria the majority of whom are of Armenian background, refugees from Ukraine and a handful of refugees from other countries recognized through an individual Refugee Status Determination procedure (Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and a few African countries).</p> <p>Since the start of the conflict in Syria until autumn 2015 over 18,000 persons displaced due to the conflict have at some stage sought protection in Armenia of whom some 16,000 are currently hosted in the country, according to the official data. The Government continues, in principle, to take a very generous approach in offering Syrian Armenians a choice between three protection options namely by way of (i) simplified acquisition of citizenship, (ii) accelerated asylum procedures which resulted in a 100 percent recognition rate, or (iii) privileged granting of short, mid-term or long-term residence permits. UNHCR Armenia treats Syrian Armenians arriving in Armenia, who did not apply and receive <i>de jure</i> refugee status, as 'persons in a refugee-like situation' who, notwithstanding their individual legal status and opportunity to be granted citizenship, continue to experience displacement-related vulnerabilities, requiring an emergency humanitarian response. The overall vulnerability levels continue to increase as most funds brought to Armenia by earlier arrivals are exhausted while the new arrivals reach the destination in destitute conditions.</p> <p>The majority of refugee, asylum-seeking, and displaced children live in urban settings, in particular, Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and are accommodated in a mixture of private apartments/individual accommodation, government-run communal centres and dormitories. Refugees, including refugee children, mostly have the same rights as Armenian nationals. However, in actual practice, refugees face many obstacles in achieving self-reliance and meaningful integration.</p> <p>Refugee children and youth are particularly vulnerable, for which reason they need special care and assistance. Based on participatory assessment and direct service provision by UNHCR NGO partners, a number of child protection concerns and cases have been identified. These protection concerns include inter alia some difficulties accessing or continuing education, experience of trauma or violence pre-flight, unmet psychosocial needs and limited response capacities, separation of families, as well as possible unidentified cases of separated children, some cases of child abuse, exposure to domestic violence and possibly exploitation, and refugee children with disabilities facing challenges in accessing appropriate assistance and support.</p> <p>According to UNICEF Core Commitment for Children (CCCs) guidelines, addressing child protection in humanitarian action requires quickly restoring and strengthening a range of child protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation including separation of children from their families; association with armed forces and groups; exposure to GBV; and psychosocial distress. In order to effectively address child protection issues, it is important to recognize that CP is not only a stand-alone programme but also a cross-cutting issue that must be integrated into all aspects of humanitarian response.</p>

Beyond the specific CP sectoral response, the effectiveness of other sectors' response should be strengthened through the integration of CP considerations: (e.g. ensuring all programmes include referral mechanisms for individuals requiring psychosocial support, or for potential victims of abuse and exploitation; support training of health workers on clinical management of sexual violence, facilitate delivery of key prevention messages as well as on location and access to services for survivors of GBV through different sectoral community workers, etc.). According to CCCs in Emergencies, emphasis should be laid on strengthening existing community-based mechanisms for child protection. An inter-agency plan should be developed and implemented for prevention of and response to child recruitment; advocacy against illegal and arbitrary detention for conflict-affected children should be conducted. All unaccompanied and separated children should be identified and placed in family-based care or an appropriate alternative and provided with counselling for mothers/caregivers on child development, psycho-social needs in case of emergencies.

Protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation have been one of the priority areas of UNICEF engagement in Armenia for many years. Despite its hidden nature, violence against children exists and many studies show that victims of physical and sexual abuse during childhood have an increased risk of becoming violent offenders themselves. The same refers to refugee children and youth who are among vulnerable groups in Armenia due to a lot of psychological and mental anxieties and various forms of violence and abuse they are at risk of being exposed to and/or exposed due to their unstable status and persisting intolerance by locals to accept them to their country.

UNICEF in Armenia together with its sister agency UNHCR will partner in a project to address violence and abuse issues among refugee children and youth in Armenia and support the implementation of mechanisms to foster a protective environment for them. This will be realized through:

1. Rapid assessment of the situation of refugees and persons displaced from Syria, with a specific focus on refugee children and youth in Armenia, including in some dormitories and social houses where refugees reside, and
2. Provision of recommendations to UNICEF and the Government of Armenia for required interventions both at national and local levels to address those issues.

3. Overall purpose of the assignment

UNICEF in Armenia is looking for an international consultant that will review and undertake rapid assessment of the situation of child protection issues among refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Armenia, including in the urban setting living in private apartments, Government dormitories and reception centres, and develop a package of recommendations for UNICEF, UNHCR and the Government of Armenia and all involved parties with the goal of improving the situation of refugee children and youth in Armenia. The assessment methodology and scope of engagement should be in line with UNICEF CCC in emergencies. The consultant will work with a local expert and will undertake a rapid assessment of the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Armenia through in-depth interviews and face-to-face meetings and will also look into the existing legislation, bylaws, and key procedures relevant for refugees and asylum seekers in Armenia.

The obtained and analyzed information will result in a final report with recommendations for improving the situation of refugee children and youth in Armenia. The recommendations for the improvement of the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria will be presented at a workshop at a later stage.

4. Duty station: Yerevan, Armenia

5. Supervisor: The consultant will be supervised and report to UNICEF Deputy Representative and UNICEF Representative about the progress of the consultancy. The consultant will work on a daily basis with UNICEF Child Protection section and will remain in close contact with UNHCR Protection Officer. The Child Protection section will interact with the chosen consultant in negotiation and communicate through e-mail correspondence while outside of Armenia as well as support the consultant in the country.

6. Major tasks to be accomplished:

1. Develop research methodology and conduct desk review:

Develop timeline, description of tasks and outline of the report. Conduct a desk review of international standards, (regional) good practices, available national studies, evaluations, and reports, and data from relevant ministries and agencies. The assessment methodology and scope of work should be in line with UNICEF CCC in emergencies.

2. Conduct analysis of Armenia's legal and policy framework, as well as mechanisms and procedures and undertake field assessment:

Undertake rapid assessment of the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria based on existing legislation and policies; conduct in-depth interviews and face to face meetings with

refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria, in order to identify child protection concerns including inter alia:

- difficulties accessing or continuing education;
- need for and availability of child-friendly spaces;
- the experience of trauma or violence pre-flight;
- the experience of the asylum procedure and its impact on refugee children health (physical, mental) and welfare;
- psycho-social needs and response capacities;
- prevalence of child abuse, exposure to domestic violence and exploitation (including labour, sexual etc.);
- prevalence of separated families and protection impact on children;
- mechanisms for identification of unaccompanied and separated children and available systems for access to the asylum procedure and appropriate accommodation/care system including the option of refugee foster-families;
- the capacity of relevant partners (government and non-government) to undertake best interest assessments
- protection of refugee children with disabilities;
- gender awareness;
- protection of sexual minorities and gender identity issues;
- integration within the local community, self-perceptions and evidence of links with the local population, main challenges to integration of children.

Organise meetings with refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Armenia; community-based organisations; NGOs working with refugees including social workers, psychologists and caseworkers; NGOs within the child protection network; State Migration Service; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Integrated Social Services and Social Protection Units; Management of social housing and reception centre; UNHCR and other international organisations to collect and synthesize information for assessment of the situation.

3. Produce a final assessment report on the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Armenia:

- Draft the report based on the comprehensive assessment related to the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria
- Provide concrete recommendations to UNICEF, UNHCR and the Government of Armenia on relevant amendments, including on legal amendments, policy development, and project activities
- Undertake validation of the findings during workshop, which would be reflected in the final report
- Consult the research results with Armenian authorities, UNHCR, and UNICEF. Finalise the report, based on comments and recommendations received.

4. Deliver a workshop and present key findings and recommendations, as well as share best practices:

Produce a brief presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the final report and present it to key Government counterparts, NGOs, community-based organisations and youth representatives and experts, undertake validation of the findings and share best practices at a workshop.

7. Deliverables:

1. Research methodology developed and desk review conducted in line with UNICEF CCC in emergencies.
2. An assessment conducted: Field work completed and information collected from informants.
3. A final report with recommendations drafted and presented to UNICEF.

UNICEF reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/outputs is incomplete, not delivered or for failure to meet deadlines (fees reduced due to late submission: 20 days - 10%; 1 month-20%; 2 months-50%; more 2 months – payment withheld). This ToR is an integral part of the contract (SSA) signed with the consultant.

8. Time-Frame:

The selected consultant will work a total of **36 days: 14 days** remotely to undertake desk review and analysis of existing documentation, **14 days** in the country mission, **5 days** out of country for preparing the report, then **3 days** back in the country to present the report to stakeholders during the month of end October-November, 2015. The exact schedule of the activities will be agreed with the contractor based on the project implementation progress. The deadline for submission of final deliverables to UNICEF is **mid-December, 2015**.

9. Qualifications or specialized knowledge/experience required:

- Advanced degree in Human Rights, Child Rights and Child Protection, Social Science and Psychology;

- At least 5 years of experience in conducting assessments, in particular, similar assessments for UNICEF is an asset, with a particular focus on refugees, in particular, children and youth, analysis of legal framework and provision of policy-level recommendations that can be practically applied in the national context.
- Ability to conduct in-depth assessment with refugee children and youth of many different backgrounds and profiles, in particular, those being victims of violence (sexual, physical, etc), LGBT, analyses and synthesize information and keep professional confidentiality due to sensitivity of the issue
- Proven track-record of successful situational analysis and policy development strategy;
- Proven sufficient capacities that ensure a successful completion and high quality of deliverables
- Experience in working with or in the field of refugee protection and asylum is an asset
- Experience in working in CEE/CIS region is an asset
- Fluency in English (written and spoken)
- Profound communication skills to interact with refugees, asylum-seekers and persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Armenia , in particular, children and young adults and cope with emotional situations
- Excellent listening, observational and verbal communication skills
- Sensitivity, empathy, and rapport

10. Procedures and logistics:

UNICEF will cover the international travel costs and DSA for the period spent in the country. Whenever the consultant will be required to travel in Armenia a travel authorization (TA) will be issued to the consultant and travel expenses provided on the basis of UNICEF standards. UNICEF does not provide or arrange health insurance coverage for consultants, but will cover the injury costs if those happen during the duty through a partner insurance company (in a separate attachment).

11. Procedures and logistics:

Interested individuals are requested to express their interest to UNICEF in Armenia within 2 weeks from the date of the publication of this announcement, by **2 November 2015** specifying:

- The methodology they intend to use in implementing the assigned tasks;
- A detailed work plan (with activities and timeframe) for the completion of the assigned tasks;
- Detailed budget for completing the assignment;
- CV, UN P11 form and a letter of motivation.

All necessary documents should be provided in English to the following e-mail address: mmovsesyan@unicef.org.

The final selection of the consultant will be conducted by UNICEF in Armenia based on the qualifications of the candidates, their relevant experience, and the quality of the proposal presented.

UNICEF does not provide or arrange life or health insurance coverage for consultants and individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are fully responsible for arranging, at their own expense, such life, health and other forms of insurance covering the period of their services as they consider appropriate. The responsibility of UNICEF is limited solely to the payment of compensation for service-incurred death, injury or illness as per the provisions detailed below. UNICEF Armenia reserves the right not to pay the Contractor or withhold part of the payable amount if one or more requirements established for this assignment is not met or deadline set for the accomplishment of the tasks is missed.

Annex 2. Research questions for the assessment

1. What are the main protection challenges faced by asylum-seekers, refugees and displaced population in Armenia (in particular children) upon arrival and during reception phase, during asylum procedure (or acquisition of citizenship), and during integration period?
2. What are the differentiated risks for pre-school age children, school-age children, and youth/older children?
3. What is the current situation of asylum-seeking children, refugee children, and the general population (in particular children) living in Armenia? This concerns *inter alia* access to education, health care (including reproductive health), social benefits, housing, and psycho-social assistance, but particularly protection issues such as increased vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and violence (separation of families, economic hardship faced by families, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, bullying, stigmatisation and discrimination etc., as well as lack of capacity among authorities, NGOs etc., to identify, respond and provide protection to child victims or children at risk of becoming victims). What are the risks/protection gaps for children with specific needs such as those with disabilities, separated children, children with chronic or acute health concerns, etc.
4. Within the frame of questions 1, 2 and 3: what is the perception of the children themselves of protection risks faced/experienced?
5. Within the frame of questions 1, 2 and 3: what is the perception of families and of refugee communities of the protection risks faced/experienced?
6. Within the frame of questions 1, 2 and 3: what is the perception of service providers (both State and non-governmental) in terms of protection risks faced/experienced?
7. What are the main differences between asylum-seekers, refugees and displaced population in Armenia in terms of protection risks faced?
8. Who are the main actors at national and local level involved in the protection of asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia during the phases of reception, asylum procedure, and integration? ,?
9. What are the main laws, strategies, policies, projects and activities implemented with regard to child protection in Armenia, and do these projects and activities sufficiently
 - a. mainstream the special needs of asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children within the projects?
 - b. address special needs and particular situation of asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children (for example, child-friendly spaces in the Reception Centre for asylum-seekers)?
 - c. put in place a protection network to identify and respond to protection challenges? What are the specificities of protection challenges faced by asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children that are not addressed by the existing strategies, policies, projects and activities in Armenia?
10. How are the best interests of asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children assessed in Armenia? Are stakeholders sufficiently equipped to undertake BIA/BID for asylum-seeking, refugee, and displaced children?
11. How are asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children involved in decisions taken about their lives by (i) families; (ii) communities; (iii) authorities and NGOs involved in service provision?
12. What are the needs and requirements to improve the current situation, to strengthen the protection of asylum-seeking, refugee and displaced children in Armenia? According to (i)

the children/youth themselves; (ii) refugee families and communities; (iii) authorities and other NGO service providers? What are some good practice models from other countries that could be proposed for Armenia, from (i) Europe; (ii) other CIS countries?

Annex 3. Data Collection Instruments

In-depth questionnaire for children 13-18 years

Could you please fill in all below questions? We appreciate your time and help.

I. About you

1.	Gender	
2.	Date of birth	
3.	Country of origin	
4.	Your mother tongue	
5.	Do you speak Armenian?	
6.	Do you have family members here in Armenia, who they are?	
7.	Do you have family members here in your country of origin and who they are?	

II. Basic Information

1.	How is the life in Armenia? Try to compare with the country of origin.
2.	Do you have Armenian friends and/or friends of other nationalities? If yes, what nationalities? What is friendship like here and in your country of origin?
3.	Do you work? If yes, for how long, where and in which conditions?
4.	How do you feel yourself outside (in the street, in the yard)? Do you feel safe? If not, what is the reason?
5.	Do you go to school? If yes, please specify the number of the school. What do you like at school and what you dislike? What problems do you face at school in Armenia as compared with the school in your country of origin?
6.	How do you communicate at school? Do you understand the language? Do you understand teachers? Do you understand classmates? If not, what you do?
7.	What are your good and bad memories concerning the country of origin?
8.	Where do you live in Armenia? In which district, street? Do you have your own room? Where do you do your lessons?
9.	What are the relations between boys and girls? At home, at school and in general? What is different to your previous experience?
10.	Do you (your family) want/plan to move from Armenia? If yes, where and when?
11.	What are your plans for the future?

III. Abuse and violence

We would like to talk about some attitudes that adults perform towards children and teenagers. Those attitudes that can harm, upset, frighten or make a kid feel uncomfortable at home. We would like to learn about your experience and experience of your friends/relatives and colleagues during last year.

1. Did anybody take alcohol at your place and then performed in a way that frightened you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who did it, how, why, where and when?

2. Did anybody take the drug at your place and then performed in a way that frightened you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

3. Have you heard and/or seen adults shouting and crying at your place in a way that frightened you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

4. Have you seen adults beating each other, making other physical harm?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

5. Have you seen anybody using knives, guns or other things to harm or frighten each other?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

6. Did you live anywhere, where you witnessed war, bombing and shooting people?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

- Did any of your family members (father, mother, elder brother or sister, aunt or uncle) behave the following way during last year in order to force you to feel shame?
If yes, provide details who, how and why.*

7. Shouting at you loudly and aggressively?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

8. Bullying you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

9. Did not let you come into the home for a long time?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

10. Threatening to kill you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

- Some adults don't really know how to take care of the children and children don't get enough to grow up healthy. Did anything like that happen to you?*

11. Did you feel that you don't get enough food or water either there was enough for everybody else?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

12. Have you been forced to wear torn, small, dirty, too warm or not enough warm clothes?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

13. Were there situations when you weren't treated well enough when you were ill (weren't take to a doctor or weren't given medicaments)?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, provide details who, how and why.

Sometimes adults within a family can harm children. Did you experience something like the following during last year?

14. Beating with the hand?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

15. Beating with anything?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

16. Burning different parts of your body? If yes, provide details who, how and why.

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

17. Suffocating?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

18. Pulling your hair?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

19. Threatening with a knife or a gun?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

Sometimes adults are trying to sexually harm children. Did you experience something like the following during last year?

20. Did anybody make you watch movies and videos of sexual nature?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

21. Did anybody touch your intimate zones and forced you to touch his/hers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

22. Did anybody try to make a movie of sexual nature with you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

23. Did anybody force you to have sex with him/her?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, provide details who, how and why.

24. Do you want to add something or to discuss something more detailed with a psychologist, social worker, physician or other professional?

Thank you for your support and collaboration

Drawing exercise for children 6-12 years

Instruction for a child

Draw a picture of everyone in your family, including you. These persons should do something.

Try to draw people, not cartoons or stick people.
Remember, make everyone doing something.

Follow-up questions:

- Can you please tell who/what is drawn in the picture?
- What is each family member doing? Where are they?
- What does each family member feel? Are they happy or sad? Why are they happy or sad?
- Who is the happiest of them and why? Who feels the saddest and why?
- What is each family member thinking about?
- How old is the child in the drawing?
- What can anger, sadden, scare or cheer up each family member?
- What does each family member like doing together? What do family members dislike doing?
- Where do family members work or study?
- What duties does everyone have at home?
- What are the child's relationships like with their family members?
- Does this family have a secret that others don't know about?
- What was the saddest/the happiest day or event for the family? What are your happiest and saddest memories from your hometown (Syria/Iraq/Ukraine)?
- What is most difficult for the family in Armenia?
- What do you dream about?
- Other specific questions related to the contents of the drawing (e.g. if other figures or pets are drawn, one should ask questions such as "Where do they live? Who does it belong to? What is it thinking about? What does it like?"

Questions for focus groups with adults

The introduction of focus group goals and objectives and moderators.

- This focus group (interview) is scheduled within the project conducted by UNICEF. Its aim is to collate information on the children's situation in Armenia to improve it in the future. Thank you for your participation. This is extremely important to us.

The introduction of focus group tips and procedure.

- We will ask several questions. There are no wrong or good answers, all that you will say is important to our research. If you do not want to answer a question please just let us know.
- Only for focus groups - If you prefer to talk to us individually, we are available to you after the meeting or another day. Please let us know should you wish to meet us for an individual interview.

The introduction of participants.

-
1. General question: What are the main problems and challenges your children face in Armenia? (How is your life in Armenia?)
 2. Access to education and education
Issues to be raised: education: access to education, kindergartens, do they attend school, do children understand what is being said during classes, do they attend additional classes, sports classes etc., are there any problems to enrol a child to a school
Violence in school: do children have Armenian colleagues, is there any violence against children, do they complain about it at home
How they communicate with teachers and other parents, do they (parents) attend meetings organized at schools
Kindergartens, access, enrolment, is it possible to send a child to a kindergarten
 3. Healthcare: treatment by the medical personnel (doctors, receptionists, nurses), do you often have to go to a doctor with your child (ren), any chronic health problems?
 4. Psychological assistance, do you think your child needs to see a psychologist?
 5. Housing: do children have their own room, where they do homework?
 6. Disabilities: Do you have children with disabilities, what kind of disabilities, how they function, do they attend school, so they have access to rehabilitation
 7. Documents: Problems with documents, do children have documents? Is it easy to get a document for a child? Problems faced.
 8. Social relations with peers/native population/discrimination/bullying
 9. Abuse (physical, psychological, sexual, and economical)? Have you or your child been abused?
 10. Do your children work? Where? For how long? When?
 11. Did you hear about the refugee, asylum-seeking, displaced or Syrian Armenian children experiencing any problems with:
a) Education (School, Kindergarten, University); b) Healthcare; c) Malnutrition, d) Housing; e) Disability; f) Social Services (Social Benefits, pension etc.); g) Problems with documents; h) Social relations with peers/native population/discrimination/bullying; i) Abuse (physical, psychological, sexual, economical); j) Unaccompanied children/deprived of parental care; k) Other (specify).
 12. Travel to Armenia and arrival in Armenia: How did you get to Armenia? (Details, when you/your family moved to Armenia?)
How did you reach Armenia (transport, documents, and visas)? How your trip was organized?
Did you travel together with your children? Where they your children?
Did you travel with other children?
Any difficulties in getting to Armenia, crossing the Armenian border (at the airport/border checkpoint)?

Detained upon arrival in Armenia/at any point during your stay? With children?
Did you apply for asylum? Why have you not applied for asylum?
Why did to flee/go to Armenia? Do you have relatives in Armenia? If yes, provide details.
Where do you live in Armenia now? Is there a problem to find and rent a flat/house?
Have you ever had any problems with landlords? (EXCEPT TAC, but relevant to asylum-seekers living outside TAC)

13. Do you work? Where? Is this a permanent job? What do you do? How did you get a job?
Is it easy to get a job in Armenia?
14. What difficulties do you/your family members experience in Armenia? Especially in the following areas: a) Education; b) Healthcare; c) Housing; d) Employment; e) Disability; f) Social Services (Social Benefits, pension etc.); g) Problems with documents; h) Social relations with native population/discrimination; i) Other (specify).
15. Are Armenians welcoming and open? How do they react? Do you and your family (children) feel safe in the streets?
16. Do you get any assistance from a state institution or NGO? What type of assistance?
How did you learn about them? Are you satisfied with their services? Tell about your bad and good experience of communication with these organizations.
17. How do you think women are treated, as compared to men in Armenia? How do you think people of different colour are treated in Armenia? Do you know any gay or lesbian?
18. What are the needs and requirements to improve your/your children's current situation in Armenia? What will you change? What works and what does not?
19. Do you (or your relatives, friends) plan to leave Armenia in the coming future? Where would you like to go? When?
20. Are Syrian-Armenians, refugees, migrant (depends on the group, it could be Ukrainians, Iranians etc.) welcome in Armenia?

Thank you for your support and collaboration

Questions for initial survey for stakeholders

The purpose of this survey is to collate information on child protection related cases in Armenia. It will help us to conduct our research. We would appreciate your time and effort.

Please fill in the survey by 22 January 2016.

Thank you!

Name and surname (this is not obligatory)

Name of the organisation/institution:

I am a:

Lawyer

Social worker

Psychologist

Interpreter

Teacher

Other

Have you encountered, worked with or assisted a refugee, asylum-seeker, Syrian-Armenian or other displaced child (up to 18 years) who was or could be:

	YES	MAYBE	NO	I do not know	If yes, please provide the following information: country of origin, gender, and year of birth	If yes, would you be able to discuss this case with us?
Unaccompanied or separated child						
Child abandoned by his/her parents (for example they left Armenia to work in another country)						
Gay, lesbian, transgender child						
Child victim of trafficking or smuggling (this includes persons who are planning to be smuggled to another country)						
Victim of trauma (child who for example was tortured or witness of/was exposed to torture, death, bombing, military operations, war etc.)						
Child forced to work/exploitation (younger than 16 years)						
Child forced into prostitution						
Child victim of domestic violence (physical, economic, psychological)						
Child victim of violence (in a hospital/policlinic, in school, on a street for example by teachers, peers, medical personnel)						

Child exposed to neglect						
Child victim of sexual violence						
Child whose mother/father/sibling was victim of domestic violence						
Stateless child						
Child who has not been registered after birth						
Child who does not have Armenian citizenship but his/her parent(s) does(do)						
Child who lives with an informal guardian						
Child with disability (for example physical or mental)						
Child with learning difficulties						
Child whose parents are homeless (asylum-seeker, refugee, person displaced)						
Child suffering from malnutrition						
Child with chronic health problems						
Child who does not attend school						
Child who has difficulties in accessing/continuing education						

Thank you!

Questions for stakeholders - interviews

1. What are the main challenges and problems regarding Syrian-Armenians arriving in Armenia?
2. What are the main challenges in integration of Syrian-Armenians in Armenia?
3. What are the activities that the Ministries are carrying out in regard to displaced population in Armenia? Assistance provided to refugees and Syrian-Armenians? What type? What challenges faced?
4. What are the plans to improve the situation of Syrian-Armenians living in Armenia?
5. How many persons of Syrian-Armenians applied for citizenship?
6. How many persons from Syria have arrived in Armenia? How many children there are?
7. How many Syrian-Armenians have left Armenia?
8. Are there any specific programmes dedicated to refugees and Syrian-Armenians, displaced persons?
9. What are the main challenges in the field of housing, access to the job market, education, and health care?
10. What are the main problems on the field of refugee protection in Armenia?
11. What are the main challenges in the field of protection of Syrian-Armenian children?
12. Is there a strategy on the integration of Syrian-Armenians? Is there any policy developed regarding Syrian-Armenians?
13. What about those Syrian-Armenians who do not want to apply for Armenian citizenship? Why they do not what?
14. Challenges with access to education of Syrian-Armenian children and refugee children, as well as asylum-seeking children. What are the main problems?
15. Are there developed any special curriculum programmes dedicated to foreign children (pupils) and Syrian-Armenian children?
16. What is a school dropout rate? Is this a problem? What about foreign pupils and Syrian-Armenians?
17. Access to kindergarten. Is this a problem? How will it be solved? What about mothers/fathers who cannot take a job because they have to take care of their children?
18. Are there any training opportunities for teachers working with foreign pupils?
19. Is there any assistance provided to schools where there are foreign pupils?
20. Access to the education of disabled children? Are there any special schools (integration schools), integration classes (for both disabled and non-disabled children), are teachers ready to work with disabled pupils? What about kindergartens, are there any?
21. School violence. Is this a problem? Any projects dedicated to this issues? Who is bullied and by whom? Is this problem concerns foreign pupils?
22. What are the main problems in the field of social assistance to refugees and Syrian-Armenians? What are the general problems of social protection in Armenia (besides financial issues)?
23. Is child labour in Armenia a problem? What are the numbers? Any programmes/projects to tackle this issue?
24. Child rights: state institutions' work, inclusion of foreign children into the strategy, protection of rights of foreign children
25. Discrimination against refugees, asylum-seekers, and Syrian-Armenians, is this a problem?
26. The main challenges with integration of refugees and Syrian-Armenians?

27. Type of housing available to refugees and Syrian-Armenians, problems, access to new housing, access to flats, and houses on the market, local housing available, access to private housing.
28. Protection of tenants against expulsion. What procedures are in place?
29. Protection of children with disabilities. What are the main challenges? What projects/programmes are being implemented?
30. Integration at the local levels, challenges, and good practices.
31. Self-employment opportunities, how to start and run a business in Armenia, is this an easy task to do?
32. State Employment Service - programmes for refugees and Syrian-Armenians, training, vocational training, assessment of the needs, vocational training.
33. The main challenges faced by the Social Integration Service, what are the main problems, shortages (besides money)?
34. What are the main problems faced by the refugee and Syrian-Armenian families?
35. What are the main cases/problem they have to deal with regarding children?
36. Malnutrition, is this a problem in Armenia and in particular among refugees and Syrian-Armenians, displaced persons?
37. Psychological assistance, is this offered? To whom and on what basis?
38. What are the main challenges in the protection of children in Armenia, in particular, refugee and Syrian-Armenian children?
39. What are the main problems related to pre-school children?
40. Are there any policy, guidelines on social assistance and refugees, Syrian-Armenians and displaced persons?
41. How the special needs are addressed? Psychological problems, disability etc.
42. What are the main problems regarding children protection in Armenia? In particular refugee, asylum-seeking and displaced children?
43. Discrimination, violence and child abuse.
44. Unaccompanied and separated children (new law on refugees and asylum)
45. Access to documentation, citizenship, stay permits for displaced persons. The main challenges and good practices.
46. What are Armenian society attitudes towards Syrian-Armenians, refugees, and asylum-seekers?
47. Disabled children: problems, access to education, social assistance, protection, special programmes/project
48. Crimes committed by refugees and asylum-seekers and Syrian-Armenians
49. Data on attacks and violence against asylum-seekers, Syrian-Armenians and displaced persons
50. Training for the police officers (domestic violence, child abuse, violence against non-Armenians)
51. The identification system of vulnerable asylum-seekers in Armenia? What system is in place? Which stakeholders are involved? What they are involved and on what grounds?
52. Separated and unaccompanied children: procedures, identification, who and how appoints a guardian?
53. Training for border troops officers on issues related to asylum-seekers, vulnerability, statelessness, child protection
54. The main problems and challenges at schools of foreign pupils? Are schools prepared to deal with and work with foreign pupils?
55. State support (financial, material etc.) offered to schools working with foreign pupils

56. Violence, dropouts, corporal punishment, domestic violence, sexual violence. Violence against children. Is this an issue in Armenia? Who identifies such cases?
57. Access to education for disabled pupils in Armenia. The main challenges and good practices.
58. Admission to Armenia, challenges, and good practices.
59. Violence, domestic violence, violence against children, violence between different groups accommodated in the centre, conflicts between different groups in the accommodation centre?
60. Do children attend school and kindergarten? If not why?
61. What about assistance offered to victims of domestic violence? Assistance provided to children - victims of domestic violence and child abuse.
62. Domestic violence, abuse of children, is this a problem? Projects, actions to counteract this phenomenon.
63. Identification of violence and abuse (at the national and local levels, by teachers, social service, force enforcement officers)
64. Domestic violence: data, procedures, investigations carried out.
65. Psychological and mental problems, trauma identified among residents.
66. What are the main issues/problems related to child's rights in Armenia?
67. Disability among children: social perception, services offered, access to education, health care, social assistance etc.
68. Sexual exploitation of children in Armenia.
69. Child labour in Armenia. The main challenges and good practices.
70. State's policy on children, what policies have been introduced, are being developed?
71. Foster care system, how it works, the main pitfalls, good practices. Training offered and selection of foster families.
72. Identification of children with special needs, who is responsible, when and how it is done?
73. Projects, activities, campaigns carried out by the NGO sector in Armenia on child's rights

Annex 4. Field Mission Schedule of the International Expert

DATE	TIME	STAKEHOLDER
01/02		
	10:00 - 11:30	Debriefing with UNICEF and UNHCR
	11:30 - 12:00	Meeting with UNICEF and UNHCR Representatives
	15:00 - 16:30	Meeting with State Migration Service
02/02		
	10:00 - 11:30	Meeting with Ministry of Diaspora, Middle East Department (Committee coordinating the problems of Syrian-Armenians)
	12:00 - 13:30	Meeting with Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, Social Assistance Department
	14:00 - 15:30	Meeting with Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, Family, Women and Children's Department
	15:45 - 16:30	Meeting with National Statistical Service, Household Surveys Department
03/02		
	09:30 - 10:30	Meeting with RCAS' management
	10:30 - 14:30	Individual interviews with asylum-seekers accommodated in RCAS (adults and children)
	15:30 - 17:00	Joint meeting with refugee-oriented NGOs (Mission Armenia, Caritas, CCASI, Aleppo, SOS villages)
04/02		
	10:00 - 11:30	Meeting with Police, Juvenile Justice Department
	11:30 - 13:00	Meeting with Save the Children Armenia
	14:00 - 16:00	Meeting with Child Pact (child-oriented NGOs)
	16:30 - 17:30	Meeting with KASA Foundation and Sand Castle
05/02		
	09:30 - 11:00	Meeting with the Human Rights Defender Office
	11:30 - 12:30	Meeting with Ministry of Education, Pre-school Unit and Special Education Unit
	16:00 - 17:00	Meeting with Ministry of Justice, Civic Registration Department
06/02		
07/02		
	17:30 - 19:00	Interviews with Syrian-Armenian children (6-12 and 13-18)
08/02		
	10:00 - 12:00	UNHCR strategic meeting
	14:30 - 15:30	Meeting with an expert on foster care
	15:30 - 17:00	Meeting with UNHCR's staff
09/02		
	10:00 - 13:00	Visit to the airport Zvartnots and meeting with Border Troops
	14:00 - 15:30	Meeting with Passport and Visa Department
	16:00 - 17:00	Interview with displaced persons living in social houses
10/02		
	11:00 - 12:00	Guardianship and Trusteeship Committee - Yerevan
	12:30 - 14:00	Integrated Social Service Yerevan
	14:30 - 16:00	Meeting with UNHCR's staff
	18:00 - 19:00	Interview with displaced persons
11/02		
	10:00 - 11:00	Meeting with ARCS
	12:00 - 16:00	Focus group with displaced persons living in Darbnik Meeting with teachers working in the school in Darbnik

12/02		
	10:00 - 13:30	Meeting with teachers working in schools in Yerevan
	14:30 - 15:45	Focus group with Syrian-Armenian adults
	16:15 - 17:00	Meeting with PINK Armenia
13/02		
	13:00 - 14:00	Visit to FAR Children's Support Centre
14/02		
	13:00 - 14:30	Interview with an asylum-seeker from Iraq
	16:00 - 18:00	Interview with Yezidi community in Zvartnots village
15/02		
	11:00 - 14:00	Individual interviews with RCAS' residents
	15:30 - 17:00	Debriefing with UNICEF

Annex 5. List of Key Informants and Respondents Interviewed

- Ministry of Labour and Social Issues
- Ministry of Diaspora
- Ministry of Justice
- National Statistical Service of Armenia
- Ministry of Education and Science in Armenia
- Police of the Republic of Armenia
- Passport and Visa Department of the Police in Armenia
- Human Rights Defender's office
- State Migration Service
- Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers
- National Commission for the Protection of the Rights of the Child
- Family, Women, and Children Rights Protection Unit
- Guardianship and Trusteeship Committee and Body in Yerevan
- Integrated Social Service in Yerevan
- Border Troops at the Zvartnots Airport
- UNICEF
- UNHCR
- KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation
- Armenian Red Cross Society
- Save the Children Armenia
- World Vision Armenia
- Armenia Relief Society
- Center for Coordination of Syrian-Armenians' Issues
- 'Aleppo' Compatriotic Charitable
- Mission Armenia
- Fund for Armenian Relief Children Support Centre
- Women's Resource Centre Armenia
- Children for Armenia Fund
- Tatevik NGO
- SOS Villages Armenia
- Caritas Armenia

Annex 6. List of reviewed documents

- Convention on the rights of the child
- Convention on the status of refugees
- Constitution of the Republic of Armenia
- Constitution of the Republic of Armenian (amended in 2015)
- Law of the Republic of Armenia on Refugees and Asylum (2009)
- Law of the Republic of Armenia on Refugees and Asylum (amended in 2016)
- Law on the Rights of the Child (1996)
- Law on the Rights of the Child (bill 2015)
- Family Code
- Civil Code
- Criminal Code
- Law on Social Assistance
- Law on Border Guard Troops
- Law on foreigners
- Law on education
- Decision on establishing the procedure for placing asylum-seekers in the temporary reception centre and providing them with subsistence means, 1140-N (2009)
- Decision on confirming minimum standards of social service and care of elderly and people with disabilities, 730-N (2007)
- Decision on activity and maintenance rules of the RC 1441-N (2009)
- Order of the RA Minister of Territorial Administration N 06-P on referral letter to accommodate asylum-seekers in the Temporary Reception Centre and confirming the registry forms on asylum-seekers accommodated in that Centre (2010)
- National Programme for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (No 1745-N)
- Procedure on accommodation asylum seekers in the republic of Armenia at the temporary reception centre and livelihood support (2013)
- Procedure for submitting applications for asylum in the Republic of Armenia and their registration
- Decree of the Prime Minister on establishing a national committee on child protection, approving the bylaws and composition of the committee
- Joint Directive on approving of sample charters of child protection departments of marz authorities (Yerevan municipality)
- Decree of RA Government on Enactment of Charter of Guardianship and Trusteeship Commissions
- Draft decision of RA government on Foster Care
- Concept Note on organization of Provision of Integrated Social Services
- National Plan of Action of RA for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (2004-2015)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, 'Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage', 2013
- National Statistical Office, *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia*, 2015

- National Statistical Office, *TRANSMONEE 2015. Country Analytical Report (CAR). Data on Children of Armenia by Ethnicity*, 2015
- OSCE, *Forced Labour and Labour trafficking in Armenia. Pilot Study*, 2015,
- UNHCR Executive Committee, *Conclusion on Local Integration*, No. 104 (LVI), 7 October 2005.
- UNICEF, *Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context*, 2015.
- UNHCR, *The Benefits of Belonging. Local integration options and opportunities for host countries, communities, and refugees*
- Save the Children Armenia, *Serving Children and their Families. Armenia Annual Report*, 2015
- ODIHR and MPG, *Armenia. A Migrant Integration Policy Index assessment*, 2013
- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, *Recognising Victims of Torture in National Asylum Procedures*, 2013
- UNHCR, *Beyond proof. Credibility Assessment in EU asylum system*, 2013
- UNHCR's *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status*.
- UNHCR, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced Persons. Guidelines for Prevention and Response*, 2003
- UNHCR, *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, 2008
- Ch. Dolan, *Into the mainstream: addressing sexual violence against men and boys in conflict. A briefing paper prepared for the workshop held at the Overseas Development Institute, London*, 14 May 2014
- Human Rights Committee, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant, Concluding observations adopted by the Human Rights Committee at its 105th session*, 9-27 July 2012.
- CRC, *General Comment No. 6 (2005). Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin*.
- UNICEF, *Age Assessment: A technical note*, January 2013
- Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), *Separated, asylum-seeking children in European Union Member States. Comparative report*, 2010
- UNICEF, *Evaluation of family support services and stakeholders contribution to related services/systems*, 2015
- UNESCO, *Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education - A Global Review 2015*
- Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice*, 2010, 4th Revised Edition

Annex 7. Working Meeting on Initial Findings

On March 18, 2016, a working meeting on initial findings of the Assessment on the Situation of Asylum-seeking, Refugee, and Displaced Children in Armenia took place. During the meeting assessment methodology, preliminary findings and recommendations were presented to stakeholders.

Invited stakeholders had an opportunity to comment on the presented findings and recommendations. They were divided into five groups with each group working on one of the 5 topical areas of the assessment, including:

- Group 1: Displaced children in emergency situation
- Group 2: Campaigning and raising awareness of domestic violence, exploitation, and abuse of displaced children
- Group 3: Identification system of children at risk within displaced population
- Group 4: Assessing and reporting on the needs of displaced families
- Group 5: A network of stakeholders working on forced migration and child's rights

Each group was asked to discuss the above-mentioned topics and report back with their comments, and ideas how to approach and respond to these problems. The feedback provided by the groups is summarized below:

Group 1: Displaced children in emergency situation

1. Unaccompanied and separated children could be survivors of violence, trafficking in human beings, and thus require psychological assistance. These children could also be kidnapped. They also require special legal protection and access to information and rights.
2. There are language barriers that could be important in maintaining communication with a separated or unaccompanied child.
3. Stakeholders that should be involved include BT, SMS, NGOs (for example Red Cross), but primarily the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues. The latter should be responsible for psychological support, health examinations, providing interpreters, and guaranteeing temporary and safe shelter.
4. There is a need for a mechanism for children temporarily deprived of parental care that should include the following elements: assessment of child's best interests; access to foster family care; appointment of a guardian; procedures to identify child's relatives in Armenia (tracking system) and abroad; access to temporary placement in a state institution; constant monitoring of the child's well-being and best interests.
5. Separated children should be identified as soon as it is possible. This also includes procedures at the border checkpoints. There is a need for a local self-government body to be involved in the identification mechanism, as well as local police (law enforcement officers), members of a community and various services.
6. Guardianship committees, ISS, and NGOs, as well as international organisations, should be involved in an identification mechanism.

7. There is also a need for a referral mechanism to be in place. The mechanism should include law enforcement, BT, SMS, National Security Services (to identify a person), state child protection institutions and NGOs.
8. Identification and referral mechanism should include various stakeholders: community members and regional representatives, teachers, health workers, social workers, NGOs and international organisations, and staff working in shelters.
9. There is a need for a holistic identification system of children who are abandoned by their parents (caregivers).
10. There are already some elements of a referral and identification system in place. These, for example, include police (Department of Juveniles), tracing and searching system of ARCS.
11. There are some good practices identified around Armenia, but there is a need for capacity building activities. Existing mechanisms have to be enhanced and strengthened. This is important to guarantee full confidentiality of information shared within a system.

Group 2: Campaigning and raising awareness of domestic violence, exploitation, and abuse of displaced children

1. To prepare proper campaigns and awareness raising actions all definitions have to be clear, types of activities identified, and relevant statistics available.
2. These activities should include various stakeholders: police, educational institutions, social workers, health care sector.
3. A potential campaign and awareness raising activity should be carried out on a daily basis.
4. Knowledge and activities will reach out to target group through cooperation networks.
5. Knowledge and related activities should be also available to displaced persons. This also concerns language, which should be understandable to these persons.
6. Public TV could be a good tool to raise awareness. TV series could raise some important issues, specific topics. Other tools could include: flash mobs, focus groups, and discussions or posters sessions.
7. Children's rights, violence are the main issues that should be addressed.

Group 3: Identification system of children at risk within displaced population

1. There is a need for a mapping system. It should include SMS, PVD, local authorities. These institutions should be aware of their rights and obligations, as well as a role.
2. Assessment of the situation of a child should be carried out by social services, case managers. School visits, meetings with parents, focus groups with children should be organised.
3. A referral mechanism should be introduced. Relevant protocols of cooperation, available services, NGOs active on the field should be identified and mapped, social workers should be responsive and aware of different aspects related to displaced persons. Current referral mechanism is a weak point.
4. Proper assistance should be in place. This requires further development of capacity among teachers, school personnel.

5. International experience and good practices should be shared to develop proper monitoring, coordination system in Armenia.

Group 4: Assessing and reporting to the needs of displaced families

1. The needs assessment should be done based on periodic home visits, providing a definition of criteria (flexible enough), discussion of complex issues. The needs assessment should be a flexible approach in place to respond to complex needs of displaced persons.
2. Training should be provided to those dealing with displaced persons.
3. The system should include state institutions (Ministry of Education and Science, Guardianship and trusteeship commissions, integrated social services), SMS, BT, Ministry of Diaspora, NGOs, international institutions (for example UNICEF), service providers, the private sector, mainly: psychologists, social workers, volunteers, teachers, and pedagogues.
4. The current situation could be improved by the development of a universal family assistance package, the establishment of a database, raising awareness among the local population, improving qualifications of teachers (in particular related to working with displaced children).
5. A referral and identification mechanism has to be in place. This mechanism should include home visits, individual meetings, support packages. There is a need for a comprehensive and holistic approach.

Group 5: A network of stakeholders working on forced migration and child's rights

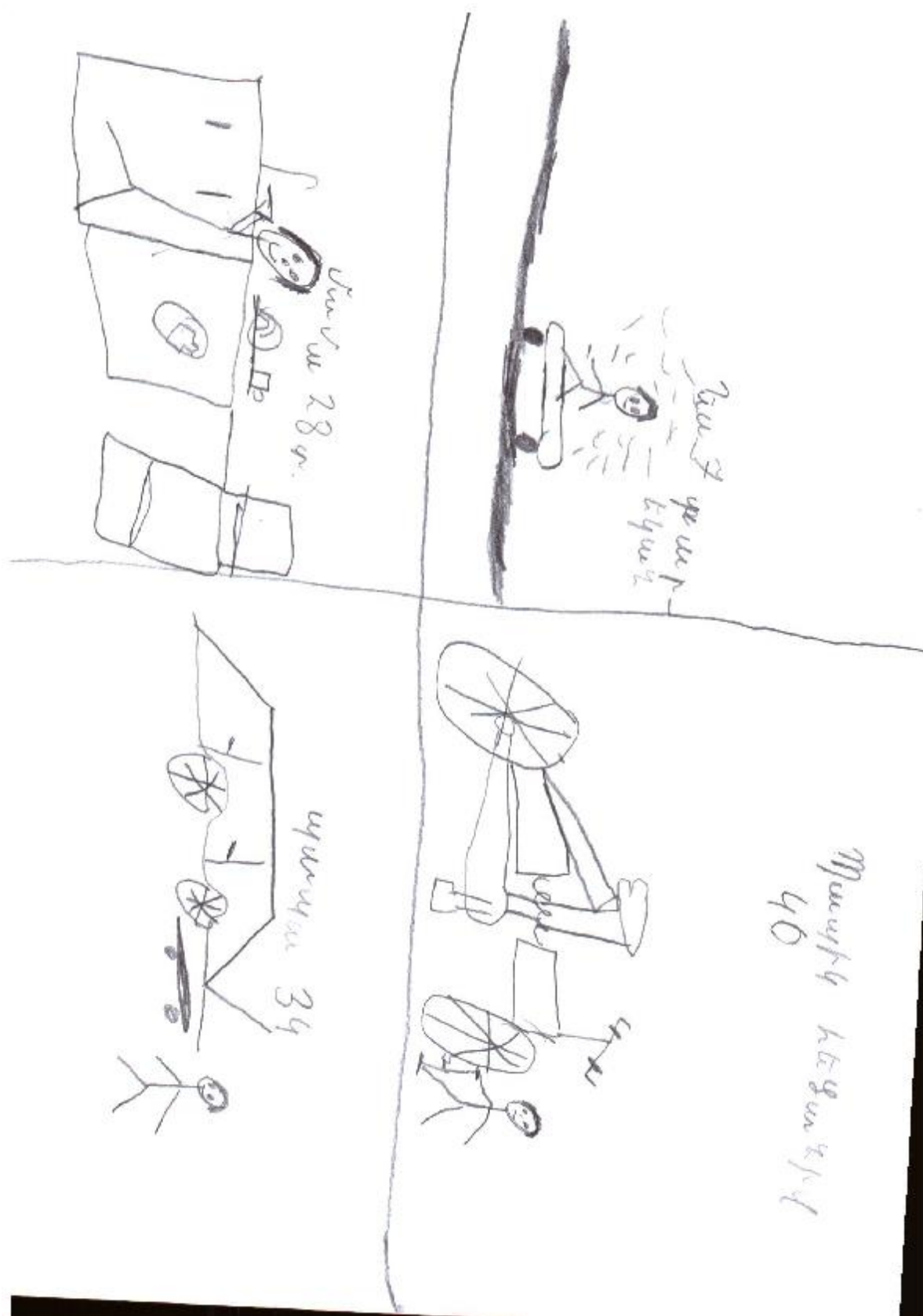
1. There is a need for a roundtable to gather various stakeholders involved in the field of child's rights and forced migration. This roundtable should discuss several overarching issues, show potential fields for cooperation, and existing gaps.
2. Mapping exercise should be carried out to identify all relevant stakeholders.
3. Good practices, existing mechanism and procedures should be further exchanged among stakeholders involved. Different actors should be more aware of projects, activities and work carried out by others.

Annex 8. Drawings

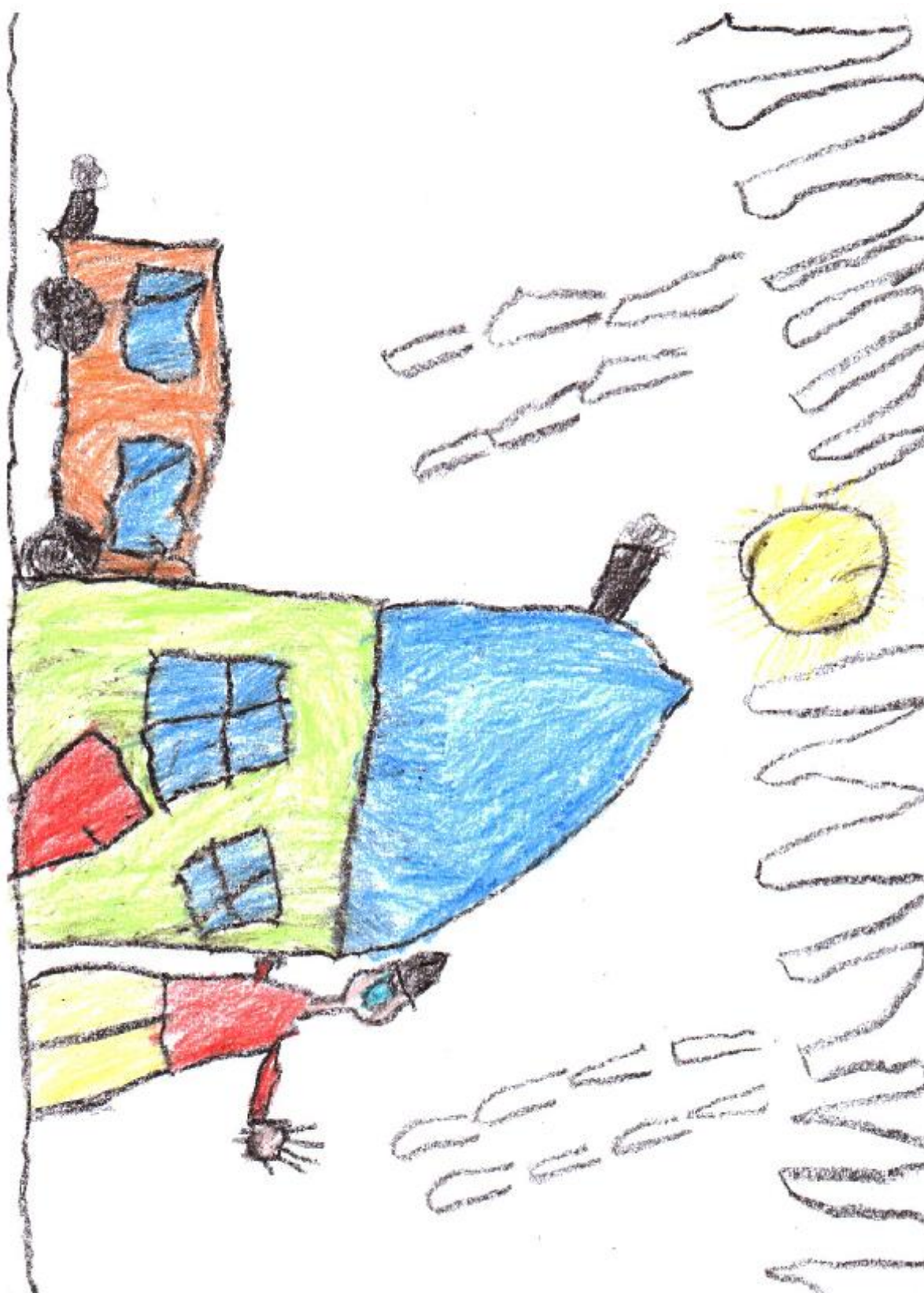
Drawing 1



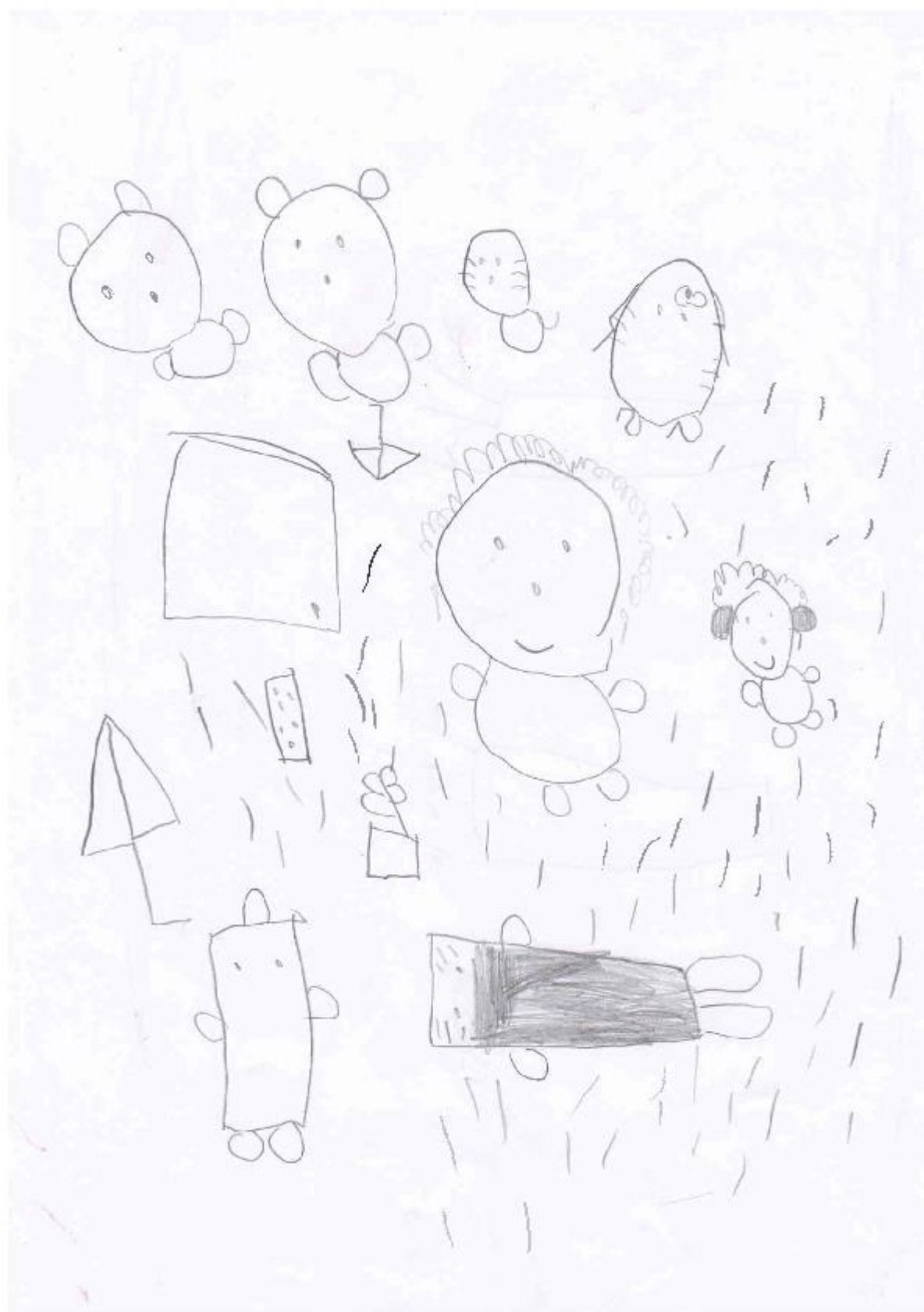
Drawing 2



Drawing 3



Drawing 4



Drawing 5



Annex 9. SOP on Unaccompanied and Separated asylum seeking children: the Main Elements/steps

In Armenia, there is a need for a holistic, integrated, and comprehensive system of identification, protection, and reception of vulnerable asylum-seekers including separated and unaccompanied children. This system has to engage different institutions, both state and non-governmental. The comprehensive, integrated and holistic child protection and reception system should include the following elements/steps:

1. The initial screening at the border (point of entry)

This is crucial to creating an early identification system of unaccompanied and separated children. The law on Refugees and Asylum does not foresee a specific role either for Border Troops, nor the PVD. However, the role of both institutions is vital to guarantee the best interest of the child. Each of these two actors has a direct contact with foreigners arriving in Armenia through the international airport in Yerevan and any land crossing point with Georgia and Iran.¹⁵⁷ The CRC underlines the need for a "[p]rioritized identification of a child as separated or unaccompanied immediately upon arrival at ports of entry or as soon as their presence in the country becomes known to the authorities (...)".¹⁵⁸ This means that all potential institutions that could have a direct contact with a separated or unaccompanied child should be engaged in the system and be aware of their role to play to identify vulnerable groups of applicants.

Moreover, according to international standards unaccompanied and separated children should always be allowed to enter the territory. Detailed interviews at this stage should not be conducted.¹⁵⁹ A separated or unaccompanied child cannot be returned to the country of origin or former habitual residence.

2. Providing Emergency/Temporary care

Immediately after the arrival, unaccompanied children should be provided with a guardian and proper reception. According to the current law, the whole identification process starts at the SMS level (under Article 50(1)) which is in general responsible for identifying vulnerable applicants "within the shortest possible period upon registration of the asylum procedure".

There is a potential gap between the child appearing at the border, a police station etc. and the arrival at the SMS premises. The BT or Police, if a child approached these institutions first, should immediately refer the case to the SMS. Then the SMS should request to appoint a guardian or custodian and place a child in a special accommodation centre or a foster family. The latter is now being developed in Armenia.

¹⁵⁷ Children may also arrive through the closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

¹⁵⁸ Para 31A, CRC, *General Comment No. 6...*

¹⁵⁹ Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice*, 2010, 4th Revised Edition, p. 20, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/415450694.html> (accessed 10 March 2016).

"At ports of entry immigration authorities should put in place procedures to identify separated children and to refer such children to the appropriate child welfare authorities."¹⁶⁰ According to the amended law, a guardian or custodian is appointed within seven days. In practice, however, it could last longer as this period starts when the SMS lodges a request to the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues.

3. Registration and Rapid Referral to Services

According to international standards, an initial interview with an unaccompanied child should be conducted. A designated and trained officer should conduct it in an age-appropriate and gender sensitive manner. A child should be identified and asked for reasons of being separated or unaccompanied.¹⁶¹

At this stage child's health, physical, psychosocial, material and other needs have to be identified. This also includes information about domestic violence, trauma, torture, and trafficking.¹⁶² This is to identify child's needs. According to Armenian law, this is done at a later stage by the SMS. Under Article 50(4) of the amended Law on refugees and asylum, the SMS "must take measures to determine the child's identity, nationality, as well as initiate the tracing of the child's parents".

4. Appointment of a Guardian

"[T]he appointment of a competent guardian as expeditiously as possible serves as a key procedural safeguard to ensure respect for the best interests of an unaccompanied or separated child and, therefore, such a child should only be referred to asylum or other procedures after the appointment of a guardian. In cases where separated or unaccompanied children are referred to asylum procedures or other administrative or judicial proceedings, they should also be provided with a legal representative in addition to a guardian."¹⁶³

The proposed procedure under the amended Law on refugees and asylum does not follow this requirement. According to Article 41.1 a guardian or a custodian should be appointed within seven working days from the day when the SMS sent a motion to the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues or the Family, Women and Children's Rights Protection Unit. As a result, appointing a guardian or custodian could take more than a week. Moreover, as the legal representative's role is limited only to RSDP, there is also a further need to appoint a guardian or custodian.

5. Providing Child-Oriented Reception Conditions

The state is obliged to provide proper care and shelter and in this respect several elements have to be taken into account, including: child's health, mental conditions, culture, gender,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Para 31B, CRC, *General Comment No. 6...*

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Para 21, Ibid.

language. Siblings should be kept together. Separated and unaccompanied children should be consulted and informed of the care arrangements being made for them.¹⁶⁴

6. Refugee Status Determination Procedure

Each and every action affecting a child should be assessed against the best interest criteria.¹⁶⁵ This is why the whole asylum procedure should be tailored to the child's needs:

- a child should have a legal representative available at no cost and during the whole procedure. S/he "in addition to possessing expertise on the asylum process, (...) should be skilled in representing children and be aware of child-specific forms of persecution."¹⁶⁶ According to Article 50(3) of the amended Law on refugees and asylum, a legal representative should be appointed to represent the best interest of the child during RSDP. S/he has to be involved in all steps of the asylum procedure.
- Interview "should be carried out in a child-friendly manner (breaks, non-threatening atmosphere) by officers trained in interviewing children. Children should always be accompanied at each interview by their legal representative".¹⁶⁷ Under Article 50(7) of the amended Law on refugees and asylum, a legal representative has to be present during the interview. It should be scheduled within two weeks after the legal representative has been appointed. Moreover, the special case manager is appointed to work on the child's asylum case. Finally, the claim lodged by an unaccompanied or separated child cannot be determined in the accelerated procedure.

There are certain standards and steps to follow during an interview with a child. A child has to be informed about the purpose and scope of the interview and has to have an opportunity to ask questions. An eye contact should be maintained. Finally, a checklist of child-tailored questions has to be prepared.¹⁶⁸

There should also be an option for a child to choose any person s/he wants to participate in an interview together with her/him. A psychologist should also be present in case there is a need to help the child with a stressful situation and/or trauma. The psychologist should also be responsible for monitoring the psychological state and well-being of a child.

7. Family Tracking

Tracing of family members should start as early as possible.¹⁶⁹ Armenian law follows this requirement. Under Article 50(4) of the amended Law on refugees and asylum the SMS "must take measures" to initiate the tracing of parents or other relatives.

¹⁶⁴ Para 40, Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interest of the Child*, 2008, p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ Separated Children in Europe Programme, *SCEP Statement of Good Practice...*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁶⁸ UNHCR, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees...*, p. 82.

¹⁶⁹ Para 31E, CRC, *General Comment No. 6...*

8. Monitoring and Follow-up

The situation of an unaccompanied or separated child should be constantly monitored. Monitoring should also concern the appointed guardian. "Review mechanisms shall be introduced and implemented to monitor the quality of the exercise of guardianship in order to ensure the best interests of the child are being represented throughout the decision-making process and, in particular, to prevent abuse."¹⁷⁰

9. Implementing a Durable Solution

There are three possible durable solutions to a child situation. Each has to be assessed against the best interest of the child. These are:

- return to the country of origin only if several conditions are met, for example, the place is secure enough and care is available.¹⁷¹
- local integration. In this case "the relevant authorities should conduct an assessment of the child's situation and then, in consultation with the child and his or her guardian determine the appropriate long-term arrangements".¹⁷²
- Resettlement, implemented if the first two options are not possible and this "is the only mean to protect effectively and sustainably a child against refoulement or against persecution".¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Para 35, Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Para 84, Ibid.

¹⁷² Para 89, Ibid.

¹⁷³ Para 92, Ibid.

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