

# Income and poverty: Challenges of post-war Artsakh



International  
Center for  
Human  
Development

a Think Tank

Artsakhis having returned to Artsakh, or still residing in Armenia, face various challenges. Many have lost everything: a home, property, all means of livelihood. Many Artsakhis were rushed out of their homes in such a hurry that they were unable to take even clothes and personal items with them. Today, having been left without a homeland, having lost family and friends, having to tend to family members who have been wounded at war and have not yet recovered, many Artsakhis face grave social challenges and can hardly imagine how they will go on with their lives.

## **The twists of the humanitarian aid**

In post-war Artsakh the loss of a stable source of income is the most wide-spread challenge. The majority of agricultural lands currently under the Azerbaijani control, the private plots of rural and urban community member lost to Azerbaijan, the jobs in small and medium businesses, as well as public enterprises have ceased to be a source of income for a considerable part of the population of Artsakh. With one stroke we have been compelled to experience a drastic increase in unemployment and poverty levels. It is already obvious that before we can think of restoring the economy of Artsakh in the new realities, we will first need to ensure bearable living conditions for people there. The need is urgent, especially in winter.

Meanwhile, we should not forget that the top priority in this regard should be transforming the humanitarian aid into ensuring conditions for people to work and generate income on their own. Otherwise, we will soon have to address the negative manifestations of providing primarily humanitarian aid, as the latter is pregnant with perhaps lateral, but quite negative risks in a long run.

After the war, the post populated public areas in Artsakh communities were the offices of Artsakh Post, where people were queuing for receiving humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, the process was characterized with discontent from the process of aid distribution. Because of the lack of effective coordination and management, the craftiest were able to get the same aid package several times, or instead of the one who really needs the aid, it is addressed to the one who actually does not need it. Essentially, such perceptions prevail among Artsakhis.

It is paramount that the provision of humanitarian aid is managed in a way that the perception of injustice is not rooted in the society. People in poverty have many fears; they are sceptical about public institutions and officials, and therefore, aid should be distributed wisely and based on relevant knowledge, evidence and local practices. It is critical for those responsible to implement the process so that the sense of injustice does not prevail, especially in this very sensitive phase.

## **Working with target groups**

At this very phase of managing the social support, we need to clearly understand what the future goals of residency and jobs should be for various groups of people, who have differently suffered the consequences of war and have eventually found themselves in different circumstances. To apply the same standards of aid to these different groups and to address only a very short-term issue can be considered an opportunity lost and time wasted. Before the new model of restoring the economy of Artsakh is outlined, and only based on it, retraining of the labour force is initiated, at this stage, the mechanisms of social support can be used to encourage people to think of long-term goals, and thus to affect their decision making regarding these long-term goals.



19 Sayat Nova  
Yerevan 0001  
Armenia

Tel.: +374 10 582638  
Fax: +374 10 527082

mail@ichd.org  
www.ichd.org

Resettling the same people from their original communities of occupied Shushi, Karintak, Hadrut and regional villages, villages of the upper sub-region of Askeran region, villages of Martuni, Mataghis and Talish villages of Martakert region, in Stepanakert and other communities of Artsakh, and restoring the original social environments in the new settlements may be critical in the future. For instance, this may allow people to maintain their local traditions and social fabrics. In this regard, the relevant work should start today, using the mechanisms of support and encouragement.

The issues people displaced from Karvajar, Kashatagh and other communities need to be addressed separately. We will need to clearly understand what kind of a future we imagine for this people: is assimilation with the general population the right mechanism, or are there other ones? Once we have come up with the answers, we need to work with them in line with the defined vision.

Incentives should be offered to manage the proportion of urban and rural populations, because we are facing the gravest risk of fast urbanization. After losing the significant part of agricultural land, people in traditionally rural households have lost hope of ever earning income from what they have always liked to do and they have started to make plans of resettling in Stepanakert and other urban communities. If agriculture, based on advanced technologies, is considered an important component of Artsakh's economy in the future, today we need to address the issue of maintaining the relevant labour force.

Such objectives should always be the background where aid programmes are designed and implemented, in order for these initiatives to become not only mechanisms of addressing present challenges, but also mechanisms of stimuli for building the future.

*The policy brief is elaborated based on the results of the online off-the-record discussion "Post-war realities: income and poverty", held on 18.12.2020. The online discussion brought together independent experts and representatives of civil society organisations and international development partners.*