

[Automatic captions by Autotekst using OpenAI Whisper V3. May contain recognition errors.]

[SPEAKER\_06]

In this episode of Café Social, we revisit the theme of practicing social work in crisis situations.

In a previous episode, we heard about the closure of the Lakan Corridor between Armenia and Nekorokarabac, Nekorokarabac also known of as Atsak.

This episode described the blockade of Nekorokarabac and the challenges Armenian social workers faced when trying to reach and help people that were trapped there.

The day we published this episode, in September 2023, the Azeri troops had begun bombing the Karakorovac, leading to a mass exodus of the local population through the Lakan corridor to safety in Armenia.

In today's episode, we revisit the social workers of Armenia, supporting a population in crisis, but now as refugees in Armenia.

Britta Jerstedt, Associate Professor at UIS, talks to social workers from Yerevan University about what it is like to work in these crisis situations.

[SPEAKER\_05]

Du skal nå få lytte på en episode av Café Social, produsert av Institutt for Socialfag med Universitetet i Stavanger.

Og mitt navn er Venke Hovland.

[SPEAKER\_06]

And my name is Sarah Heen, and you're about to listen to an episode of the Café Social podcast series, produced by the Institute of Social Work at the University of Stavanger.

[SPEAKER\_03]

My name is Brita.

I am an associated professor at the University of Stavanger at the Institute of Social Studies.

I am very happy to be in the studio with my guests from Jerevan State University.

We cooperate because we have together an Erasmus Plus mobility project.

I have three guests here.

I would like you to present yourselves, and we will start with you, Mr. Kajap-Friend.

[SPEAKER\_00]

I am Ardak Khachatelhan, Associate Professor for Yerevan State University, Chair of Social Work and Social Technologies.

[SPEAKER\_04]

I am Lyanna Mukerchan, lecturer at Yerevan State University.

I studied Social Work, Bachelor and Master degree at this university.

Now I am teaching here for 14 years.

I am happy to be at Stavanger University and for this corporation.

[SPEAKER\_07]

Hello, thanks a lot for the invitation.

I am very glad to be here.

My name is Marina Yarmaloyan.

I am an assistant professor at the Yerevan State University Department of Social Work and Social Technologies, where I have been working since 2007.

[SPEAKER\_03]

So we are in the field of social workers and we are interested in the situation in Armenia.

right now but we know that it has a long history.

[SPEAKER\_00]

I know Karabakh from long before because it starts long before in 1990s.

[SPEAKER\_03]

You mentioned the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and you said it started already in the 90s.

Can you tell us a bit more about it?

[SPEAKER\_00]

Yes, because Nagorno-Karabakh population, because Nagorno-Karabakh conflict population was 198,000 and they did referendum and decision was to connect with Armenia and they apply Armenia and in Armenia they start the process of protesting or asking to do referendum to be in a structure of Armenia.

As a result, Azeris get angry, they started to blockade.

First blockade was that time, in 1980s.

Situation in Karabakh became... Then, I remember in 1990s, again January,

In Baku, Azeris started meeting, which takes a lot of people later, later.

You should kill all Armenians.

You can imagine Armenia.

Baku was a big population of Armenians.

Maybe I'm wrong, but half a million.

And they started to push Armenians from their flats, do violent things.

Gorbachev sent troops to Baku, where he killed a lot of Azeris, because tanks stayed in the main sphere.

Russian troops tried to escape from Baku, and all this Armenian population moved to

Turkmenistan by using ships they arrived they moved from Baku to Turkmenistan because the shortest way was that then different in different ways they arrived in Armenia it was big population huge population in Armenia refugees about 300 000

Some of refugees moved to Russia and Western European countries.

But Karabakh problem still stayed actual and Moscow government decided to do plenum on this question.

That was Karabakh problem.

Give them chance to be independent or in a structure of army or not.

Said no.

and Armenia decided to use military forces and the war starts in 1924.

Because Armenia and Karabakh were isolated from each other, first we made physical corridor for attachment, latching corridor we opened using weapons.

border regions and Armenian government decided to enlarge the occupied territory and occupied all regions related to Armenia, between Armenia and Azeris, creating some kind of buffet.

But it was for peace.

to be protection population, nobody lives there, just we move the border keeping and was established some kind of status quo, no shutting, no danger,

but nobody knows how long it will continue.

But I understood that the conflict has very deep roots.

So, since 1994, the process was started and not finished, and we even discovered a new term, neither peace, neither war.

Social specialists very often use this term.

In 2020,

Because Minsk group long time organized mediation process to establish peace, but no sides came to the common decision.

Armenia all time demand to be independent, others said no.

The organized blockade.

[SPEAKER\_04]

And when this corridor was closed,

People can't have essential goods for living.

For example, food, food for their cars, electricity some days, internet connection, everything for people to live was closed.

This led to the closing of schools, children's gardens, offices, even hospitals, because it lasted for nine months.

[SPEAKER\_00]

At least Alek decided to bump and push.

Maybe he was to frighten the population.

to live some themselves but many people killed and they leave just their houses animals and very panic in panic form running out leaving the old property my daughter was there with his husband in step on again they they everybody tries to be felt because corridor is narrow one car by one could move and traffic jam people crying and on their way it was a very tragic event just catastrophic and people frightened depressed crying children newborn children or children who could pass that short corridor survived they all appeared in Armenia.

Fortunately we were prepared.

[SPEAKER\_04]

20-23 September and they forced people to go out from Artsakh and as there is no other border to outside the country the only way is to come to Armenia They wanted to come to Armenia because they are citizens of Armenia.

There were only five days to gather and to live their childhood, their life, their land, their houses, everything that they have.

As Mira said that it is very difficult to put all your life, your identity as an Artsakh people, as an Armenian in one suite.

and to get it and to come to live without your homeland.

But people came here, spent three days in the cars with babies, with no goods, etc.

It was very difficult, but here in Armenian land we were very prepared and very welcome to Artsakh people

crisis response.

There were social workers, psychologists who were trained to help people very quickly.

[SPEAKER\_07]

Shortly after the blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan, the government of the Republic of Armenia decided to form a special working group to address the humanitarian concerns and needs of the population of Artsakh.

and subsequently this working group transitioned into so-called humanitarian center that was, Liana mentioned, set up near the Kornizor settlement in Sunik region.

It is in South part of our country.

So the main task of this humanitarian center was to effectively managing the reception and urgent accommodation

the needs of the Armenians forcibly displaced from Artsakh.

Firstly, the humanitarian center had begun providing services near Kornitsor with the objective of uniting the efforts of international organizations as well as local NGOs and human rights groups that were trying to assist in overcoming the humanitarian crisis in Artsakh and also to report the situation to the international community.

The government had prepared a lot of guest houses and hotels in all regions of Armenia, but here it is very important to mention that hundreds or maybe thousands of Armenians, who are citizens in Armenia, were ready to give their apartments, their houses, their flats, or at least to share their houses with these people.

because maybe some of them have relevance here, but many of them haven't any houses or anywhere to live.

So it was very important to provide them shelters.

So the first step was to providing shelters for these people.

And meantime, the registration of these forcibly persons from Artsakh was started.

border in order to organize the supporting process for them.

So the registration process was carried out or was implemented by the Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and according to this registration it turned out that more than a hundred thousands of people from Artsakh or almost all the population from the Artsakh was forcibly displaced from there.

So regarding the response to social protection system of Armenia to the needs of these people, at the meantime of the registration processes, because it took some time to do this process, the assessment of Argent or the primary needs of these people has started because it's important to understand what are the primary needs in order to provide some kind of necessary services. And it turns out that there are a lot of needs.

As I have mentioned in my speech, first it was to provide for a dam shelter, the main consulate that they were, some or many of them haven't anywhere to stay to live.

So housing was a problem.

Also, it was a problem to provide them some kind of financial support just to survive.

to buy a food or to buy everyday needs equipment.

So here I would like to mention two financial support programs that were carried out or implemented by the state, or if I'm not mistaken, they are going on, yes, they are continuing.

According to one financial support program, 100,000 drams, it's one type, one-time support program, was given to each forcibly displaced person from Artsakh.

According to another financial support program, if I'm not mistaken, each forcibly person from Artsakh was given 40,000 rem to rent an apartment or to rent a house and also

10,000 RON for the utility costs.

But here it is important to mention that these funds were for the people that do not have or they don't own any property in Armenia.

And this program continues or will continue until the end of this year.

So it's a continuing program.

Well, among displaced persons, there were a lot of children at the school age as well as students.

So the Ministry of Education provided opportunity for school children as well as for students to continue there.

education so many school children as well as students were you know enrolled in different schools secondary schools not only in Yerevan but also in different regions of Armenia as well as in different universities to continue their education for example we have

About 20, if I'm not mistaken, maybe Mr. Khachatryan will correct me, 20 master students from Artsakh, from Artsakh's two universities, they were involved in our master program, they wrote their master theses, they were finding them, and they got their master degrees.

So this is one example that they were given an opportunity to continue and to finish their education.

In regard of healthcare, so some kind of medical examinations as well as medical care, medical services were provided for those people at least for free.

Also during October, if I

I'm not mistaken, in 2023 the Ministry of Health organized some kind of mobile medical groups that were visited in different regions in Armenia and they provided also some medical examinations, diagnosis and also provided medical treatment and medicines for those people.

Well, here I would like also to mention that

the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Labor of Social Affairs also launched an online platform to put all together the existing resources of international organizations, local NGOs, all social initiatives that are willing to support or to help somehow those people.

So these are shortly about the response of some kind of social protection system.

for various reasons, wars, epidemics, natural disasters have become very frequent in the modern world.

So from this point of view, it's very important that social protection system of any country should be well prepared in order to respond to emergency situations in an adequate, in a timely and adequate manner.

And this is one of most

important indicators that shows that this system is functioning effectively.

[SPEAKER\_03]

I'm really horrified by the story.

It's tragic and it must be so difficult to live with.

But I'm also so impressed by your work, the work of all the sociologists workers in Armenia and also at the university in Yerevan.

I think you are doing a tremendous job.

And as you said, I think, although in your country it's an extreme situation, I think we can learn a lot from you here in safe little Norway.

So I'm looking forward.

We are going to continue our cooperation.

We have this seminar later today.

I think we can learn a lot.

I know that I have learned a lot about both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and social work from you.

So I'm very grateful for our cooperation.

[SPEAKER\_04]

Thank you.

The crisis situation shows how social workers can react.

For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs said that we need...

group of volunteers and when we say this to our students, totally everyone was listed in these volunteers.

and they came day and night working.

They were sitting on these hotlines.

They were collecting clothes, food, everything.

And we were very happy that all we teach is not just empty box.

They really react and act as social workers.

[SPEAKER\_07]

I also want to add that, first of all,

it will be the continued one but all the services I have mentioned that were provided to these people in all services social workers were included somehow

So they were in front line, they were in helping process, they were in organizing process, they were in everywhere.

So they are very important professionals, especially in emergency situations, like this situation.

[SPEAKER\_00]

Also after this event I started to think about rewriting our curricula, educational program in Irma State University because we received new cases when social workers and tech potential clients passed through the WAP.

It was a case with me because before these events we were in Stepanakert University where we were working with our master students there in two universities and

That was time when we collect people for training for short time, three months training to continue to building social protection system in Karabakh.

We implementing social element and we have the applicant woman whose husband was killed during this war and she decided that it would be better for her rehabilitation to become social worker.

When we discussed with my colleague, with her, it will be better or bad for clients, we understood that this is risky when social worker having the similar problem

will let the case of client who with similar problem because it is a risk that you should you will project your problems in her and it will bring to not correct decision and she understood and she decided to go back but still i not have clear answer to this question because when client and the caseworker have the same problem.

Has the right the social worker do casework with his client or not?

And because that time still I was the head of department, I start to think about a new course.

[SPEAKER\_06]

So in conclusion, we have gained a very small insight into the Nakorokarabac or Atsakh situation, the humanitarian crisis there and what social work is like when working in these situations.

As Brita says, even though Norway is so relatively stable and safe, we have a lot to learn from our Armenian colleagues.

largely because there are no countries that are free from refugees and we all will have to face these situations as practicing social workers.

Our Armenian colleagues show us the importance of understanding the complex history of the refugees that have led to these situations and also the importance of keeping up with current events and how circumstances may be changing for these populations.

They tell us of the importance of being prepared for refugees when they arrive and the challenges of meeting their very basic needs such as housing, medical care and education.

The importance of taking into account the trauma they have suffered and the dangers of re-traumatisation.

And finally they pose the question of how we as social work educators can prepare social workers for the future to work with populations living under such extreme crisis situations as exemplified by the refugees of Nakoro Karabach.

[SPEAKER\_05]

You have now listened to an episode from the podcast series Café Social, a series made by the Institute for Social Studies at the University of Stavanger. And my name is Venke Hovland.

[SPEAKER\_06]

And my name is Sarah Heen.

And you have just finished listening to an episode of the Café Social podcast series produced by the Institute of Social Work at the University of Stavanger.