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Increased Resilience of Syrian Armenians and Host Population (IRIS) Programme – The objective of IRIS is to contribute to the National Integration Policy that intends to guarantee a dignified life for Syrian Armenians in Armenia through full protection and integration, with the specific objective to improve social and economic resilience of Syrian Armenians and host population and to strengthen institutional capacities for economic growth in Armenia. The programme is being implemented by the consortium consisting of the Armenian Caritas Benevolent NGO, Armenian Red Cross Society, Centre for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues NGO, SME Cooperation Association and led by the Austrian Red Cross. Save the Children is associate partner to the programme. IRIS programme is funded by the [EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis](#), the ['MADAD' Fund](#), Austrian Development Cooperation and Austrian Red Cross.

"Increased Resilience of Syrian Armenians and Host Population" (IRIS) Programme

On 18th July 2018 the official launch event for the "Increased Resilience of Syrian Armenians and Host Population" (IRIS) funded by the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'MADAD' Fund, and the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) was held in Doubletree by Hilton hotel Yerevan. The aim of the three-year programme is to contribute to the National Integration Policy that intends to guarantee a dignified life for Syrian Armenians in Armenia through full protection and integration, with specific objective to improve social and economic integration of the Syrian Armenians and host population and to strengthen institutional capacities for economic growth in Armenia.



With opening remarks to the event attended RA Minister of Diaspora Mr. Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia H. E. Piotr Antoni Świąłski, Deputy Head of the Office of Austrian Development Agency to Armenia Ms. Nora Alanakyan, Head of the International Cooperation division of the Austrian Red Cross Mr. Walter Hajek and Secretary General of the Armenian Red Cross Society Ms. Anna Yeghiazaryan. High level guests stressed the importance of this programme for both Syrian Armenians and host population.

During the event the IRIS programme manager presented the objectives and targets of the programme as well as the four components of the programme, namely Housing Support, Service Information, Social Inclusion and most important Economic Integration, through which the positive changes will be made in the life of Syrian Armenians and their counterparts from Armenia.

It is important to stress that more than 1.9 mio. EUR from the programme have been allocated on the Economic Integration component – with its main part being the establishment of a Business Incubator – which makes IRIS the biggest EU-funded economic programme for Armenia so far. During the event representatives of implementing consortium partners, i.e. Armenian Caritas, Armenian Red Cross Society, Coordination Centre for Syrian Armenians' Issues and SME Cooperation Association also held presentations on the respective components and activities they are going to implement during these coming three years.

EU IRIS promotes Economic Integration of Syrian Armenians

One of the most important pillars of the EU IRIS programme is fostering economic integration of the Syrian Armenians and local Armenians based in Armenia through the establishment and running of a Business Incubator. This is going to be one of the most important business incubators ever founded in Armenia which will have its strong influence on Armenian economic development, by supporting small and medium entrepreneurs through training, coaching, mentoring and finances in establishing new businesses.



Besides co-working space and free services, the Business Incubator will provide grants and non-interest loans to start-ups. The establishment of a revolving fund will ensure the sustainability of the Business Incubator beyond programme period. 200 SA and Armenian entrepreneurs will be supported in establishing business plans and receiving respective trainings, 80 entrepreneurs will receive funding and at least 70 businesses are expected to be running and creating income at program end, thus benefiting at least 210 people in their household income.

Since the launch of the programme the responsible partners for the Business Incubator – i.e. Armenian Caritas and SME Cooperation Association – are in ongoing negotiations with relevant Armenian Government institutions, international organizations and other state and non-state actors, in close coordination with the EU Delegation, as the EU is the biggest donor for start-ups in Armenia. The manager of the Business Incubator has been recruited, further relevant staff will be selected in February and March 2019. The official launch of the Business Incubator is planned for early summer 2019.

EU IRIS Programme starts Economic Integration with Traineeships

In the framework of EU IRIS programme the Armenian Red Cross Society started Economic Integration of the Syrian Armenians and host population with special traineeship programme designed to give 100 Syrian Armenians and local Armenians an opportunity to have a paid traineeship for 3 months, after which employers will look into possibilities to offer trainees permanent job contracts. The announcement about this amazing opportunity was done in the mid October and almost 80 persons applied. Interviews with



participation of the specialists from Armenian Red Cross Society, State Employment Agency and Austrian Red Cross were held in January 2019 and candidates shortlisted. It is expected that final list of the selected participants will be ready by the end of February 2019 and actual traineeships will start in March.



Housing Support for Syrian Armenians

Since the start of the EU IRIS programme in July 2018, 788 applications for housing support component got registered with Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). 333 applications were shortlisted according to the elaborated criteria, and house visits were conducted by ARCS and Caritas social workers and case managers. During two selection committee meetings – with participation of all relevant stakeholders such as UNHCR, Mission Armenia, Coordination Centre for Syrian Armenians' Issues, Armenian Caritas, ARCS and others – all cases were discussed and 100 most vulnerable families selected and assisted through provision of rental subsidies for the 3 months' period October-December 2018. 123 applications were rejected and 110 were subjected to further discussion (pending cases).

As rents are high, interests of commercial banks not affordable and Syrian Armenians lack savings and resources to pay for housing, this problem is one of the biggest challenges that needs to be approached from various levels. Therefore, in addition to rental subsidies support, in coming months also the Sustainable Housing Strategy for Syrian Armenian low and middle class families will be finalized jointly together with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholder active in the field of housing.



Information Session with Case Managers and Psychologists

On 22 December 2018, the Centre for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues (CCSAI) within the framework of the EU IRIS programme organized the first information session with state and non-state organisations. The meeting took place in the Armenian General Benevolent Union's (AGBU) Vahe Karapetyan Center. Among participants were psychologists, case managers and referral officers from Armenian Red Cross Society, Armenian Caritas, Mission Armenia, Syrian Armenian Union NGO, Fund for Armenian Relief and German Red Cross Baden-Wuerttemberg provincial branch subsidiary in Armenia. The aim of the meeting was to provide information to the case managers, psychologists and respective referral officers and partners on available services on health, education, housing and economic sector to Syrian Armenians in order to enable them to recommend the best possible support to vulnerable Syrian Armenians. During the session CCSAI provided the relevant information and held discussion with case managers and stakeholders on relevant cross-cutting issues. This kind of meetings are planned to be organized three times per year to keep all up to date.



Visiting Services for the most vulnerable older People

During first quarter of the EU IRIS programme 200 most vulnerable older beneficiaries were selected based on the needs assessment that had been conducted and analyzed. For delivering psycho-social support services 20 volunteers were recruited. Volunteers with involvement of psychologists were trained, with the aim to give volunteers knowledge about peer support mechanisms and the methods of communication with older people. Each volunteer started visiting up to 10 beneficiaries once a week, for communication and support in daily household issues, such as shopping, washing, cleaning, etc. The beneficiaries also receive food parcels and hygiene items once for per quarter, including basic needed items. Since the beginning of the IRIS programme 200 beneficiaries received twice 200 parcels.



Psycho-Social Support Centre expanding its Work for Syrian Armenians

On 15th October 2019 with the support of the EU IRIS programme the Psycho-Social Support (PSS) centre started its activities for Syrian Armenians in Yerevan. The Centre is located in the downtown and the space was provided by the Government to the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). The centre has been renovated and furnished by ARCS' own efforts. With support of EU IRIS programme two psychologists have been recruited, to organize and run the activities envisaged by the PSS centre, including consultations and social integration activities.

Currently the PSS centre provides individual psychological consultation, group psychological consultation, informative sessions, meetings with different specialists, services like entertainment clubs, promoting participation in cultural life and organization of sport events. Targeted results will be capacity development, new skills gained, positive thinking, new opportunities, positive parenting, networking and new friendships as well as improving quality of the life. So far 35 Syrian Armenians were enrolled in the activities of the PSS centre.



Child Resilience Program (CRP) Workshops in Schools

Since December 2018, within the framework of the EU IRIS programme, the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) started to conduct Child Resilience workshop in six schools. For the conduction of the workshops special handbooks were printed, which had been developed by a number of organizations including Save the Children and International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies (IFRC). What do the children learn in these workshops? The workshop consists of 20 modules such as how to overcome stress, making friends, my community, my future, what is war and violence etc. The workshops are being held for Syrian Armenian children and will last until May 2019.

Training of Trainers for the Volunteers

On 8-10 October 2018, as part of the children and youth integration and resilience within the EU IRIS programme, a three-day training was conducted by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) for 20 volunteers



with the aim to involve them in the CRP-methodology. The "Child resilience program" consists of 20 modules such as how to overcome stress, making friends, my community, my future, what is war and violence etc. From more than 100 applicants 20 volunteers were selected and invited to participate in the training of trainers, during which participants learnt about the EU IRIS programme, children's rights and protection, do's and don'ts when working with children etc. Currently these volunteers are actively involved in the CRP activities by providing workshops to Syrian Armenian and local children, aged between 6 and 14 years.

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