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BULLETIN #2

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Increased Resilience of Syrian Armenians and Host Population

IRIS PROGRAMME



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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.

IRIS Business Incubator Getting Bones and Flesh

Since January 2019, programme partners responsible for the establishment of the Business Incubator (BI) within the Economic Component of the EU IRIS programme under the lead of [Armenian Caritas](#) stepped up their efforts of activities, with the result that knowledgeable core staff and experts have been recruited and a location in the heart of Yerevan downtown has been identified and rented. European Business Network (EBN) and Voodoo marketing agency were contracted by the EU IRIS programme to provide their services for the BI, in particular currently together with the implementing partners and BI staff for elaborating guidelines and operational procedures (including SOPs for grants and loans), as well as naming and branding of the "IRIS Business Incubator" respectively. For these purposes a 5-days workshop led by the board member of European Business Network, Mr. Giordano Dichter, was held in Yerevan, and two other [workshops](#) held with experts of Voodoo marketing agency.

While partners and contracting agencies are working on the elaboration of operational procedures of the IRIS Business Incubator, the BI team of six persons is working on renovation, design and equipment of the BI premises, actively participating in the networking and informative meetings organised by the partners such as meetings with the local economic project funded by EU, start-up supporting conferences and networking events etc. with the aim to spread information about the IRIS Business Incubator as well as to build new partnerships before the actual start of operations of the BI for the public. Since June the whole team under the lead of BI Programme Manager, Ms. Narine Terzyan, also works on the elaboration of the foundation documentation package with the aim to found, launch and run the IRIS Business Incubator publicly from September 2019.

Revival of the Economic Integration Working Group

After a year of silence, on 11th February in the framework of the EU IRIS programme the [Economic Integration Working Group \(EIWG\)](#) was relaunched, originally created by GIZ funded "Economic Integration of Syrian Refugees in Armenia" (EISRA) project for the people who moved to Armenia due to the civil war in Syria. The Working Group consists of state institutions, local and international organisations active in this field and is chaired by the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments as well as [Armenian Caritas](#) in constant consultation with UNHCR. The aim of the EIWG is to create a favourable environment to support the economic integration of Syrian Armenians in Armenia, particularly through revealing related issues, combining efforts, harmonising and coordinating the activities carried out in the sector, as well as seeking more effective solutions adapted to the needs of the target people, and a plan of activities aimed at economic integration. It serves as a platform for the assessment of actions carried out in the sector of Syrian-Armenians' economic integration, information and experience exchange, joint actions and strategy development, and for advocating the rights and protecting interests. The first meeting with new members discussed the action plan, rationale of the Working Group as well as economic component of the EU IRIS programme, in particular IRIS Business Incubator and Traineeships. On his turn Mr. Stanislav Toshkov, representative of the EU Delegation in Armenia, noted that for EU it is important to have a sustainable Business Incubator with proper and acceptable operational methodology after completion of the IRIS programme. Next EIWG meeting is planned during 2nd half of the year.

EU IRIS Programme starts Economic Integration with Traineeships

In November 2018, the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) started the traineeship activity within the Economic Component of the EU IRIS programme. From 88 applicants who have been interviewed, 34 were approved, 40 applicants were selected, however final agreements were signed with eight trainees – seven women and one man – who during three months receive a monthly compensation of 125 EUR, while working and getting skills professions such as [sewing](#), cook, accountant, administrator and table design. In the meantime, already two trainees completed their assignments and one of them already has a permanent job contract in the atelier.



During these months ARCS is already collecting traineeship applications for the 2nd round of the traineeships, however it appears that job providers cannot wait that long, hence it was decided to have an early selection committee for evaluation of already existing applications, and as a results 29 applicants were interviewed, out of which 14 have been successfully signed traineeship agreements with employers, and another three were referred to World Vision. Currently [2nd public call for applications](#) is announced with the deadline of 6th of September 2019.

Please see below some traineeship success stories!

IRIS Supports Syrian Armenians to Understand Armenian Job Market

Another important challenge, which Syrian Armenians are confronted with, are the job market and working culture in Armenia, which are totally different from the one in Syria. The EU IRIS programme tries to make Syrian Armenians aware of these differences and to familiarise them with the job market in Armenia by organising professional orientation sessions. For that purpose, the first such [professional orientation seminar](#) was organised by SME Cooperation Association NGO on [30th of May 2019](#), for those Syrian Armenians who were interested in finding job in the IT sector. Seminar itself was held by the director of Instigate Consulting CJSC and on the following day participants also had chance to visit the company and to get introduced with the company and its daily work.

In order to get more synergies between the different projects supporting Syrian Armenians and thanks to the IRIS Info Hub, a cooperation was established between IRIS Programme and World Vision Armenia: it was agreed to organise professional orientation seminars jointly, in particular World Vision will organise long lasting skills learning trainings and after that sessions IRIS will organize professional orientation sessions. First joint seminars are planned for September.

IRIS Addresses Housing Problems of Syrian Armenians

One of the crucial problems of Syrian Armenians in Armenia is the housing issue and renting costs. Even though Armenia is the eastern gate to Europe, Yerevan continues being one of the expensive cities with regards to the real estate costs among Eastern European countries. To decrease the financial burden of vulnerable Syrian Armenian families, the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) within the Housing Component of the EU IRIS programme supports 100 Syrian Armenian families with monthly subsidies of 100 EUR. Every 3 month a selection committee meeting is held comprising state, local and international organisations actively working in the field – such as UNHCR, Mission Armenia, Coordination Centre for Syrian Armenians' Issues, Armenian Caritas, Armenian Red Cross and others – which reviews the applications and selects 100 beneficiaries based on special criteria elaborated by UNHCR for up-coming three months. These committee meetings also help to avoid duplications and overlapping of the work. Since the start of the EU IRIS programme, around 800 applications for rental subsidy support got registered with the ARCS, out of which 342 have been shortlisted, and house visits conducted by ARCS and Armenian Caritas social workers and case managers.

Mrs. Zvart Barsumian, one of the lucky beneficiary of the IRIS programme housing component, brings it to the point: "Unlike local Armenians who usually own their apartments, we Syrian Armenians have to rent apartments – rents are high, interest rates for credits of commercial banks are not affordable and we Syrian Armenians simply lack savings and resources to pay for housing". [More on ARCS Facebook](#).

ARCS also coordinates the activities of the Housing Consortium, the aim of which is to develop a sustainable housing strategy for Syrian Armenian low and middle class families. Since 2019 already two consortium meetings with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders active in the field of housing were held which first of all defined scope of work of the committee and further prepared Terms of Reference for a new expert or group of experts who will work on the elaboration of sustainable housing models for Syrian Armenians. The latter will be used to ultimately support the government on finding the suitable solution.

Syrian Armenian Info Hub Actively Spreading Information

The Info Hub for Syrian Armenians is now actively and regularly running its operation with support of EU IRIS programme. Coordinator of this hub and IRIS programme implementing partner [Center for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues \(CCSAI\)](#) NGO already organised two [Coordination Meetings](#) with the heads of all organisations and projects providing some services to the Syrian Armenians, with the aim to better coordinate the activities between organisations active in the field and to avoid overlapping of activities. CCSAI also held two [Information Sessions](#) with the aim to share information on existing services with those who work in the field, in particular sociologists, psychologists, case managers and referral officers. CCSAI also developed and updates information brochure on services which are available for Syrian Armenians. The printed version was published in the beginning of the year, the online version is updated regularly on the [website of the Ministry of Diaspora](#).

2nd edition will be printed in July 2019 with 500 copies and will be disseminated among the Syrian Armenians through case managers and referral officers.

IRIS PSS Centre Supports Integration of Syrian Armenians

The Psycho-social Support (PSS) Centre of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), which has re-launched its activities within the EU IRIS programme actively works with the Syrian Armenians, with the aim to foster their further integration into Armenian society.

More than 20 events have been organised by the PSS Centre for Syrian Armenians as well as older people living in dormitories, such as [patisserie](#) and cooking workshops, [embroidery/sewing](#) and designing classes as well as visits to museums and trips to the close towns. Also movie screening activities are usually being organised in the dormitories.

Besides this kind of activities psychologists of PSS Centre also provide consultations and case management to those who have some psychological problems. Currently the PSS centre has nearly 161 beneficiaries who visit the centre for psycho-social consultations at least twice a week.

IRIS Continues Gifting Smiles on the Faces of Older People

Within the Psycho-Social Component of the IRIS programme the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) continues distribution of food and hygiene parcels to the most vulnerable older people from Abovyan,





Hrazdan and Yerevan municipalities. Every three months ARCS case managers, coordinators of regional branches as well as volunteers get together and distribute the food and hygiene parcels to 200 older people in need. Since the beginning of the EU IRIS programme already four rounds of 200 parcels each were distributed. Apart from that, psychologists of Armenian Red Cross Society also trained and prepared more than 20 volunteers who on weekly basis visit 10 older people each and help them with daily household tasks or just share their company with them.

Mr. and Mrs. Kasparovs, living in one of the dormitories in Hrazdan are more than happy about the support given through the EU IRIS programme: "We are living here in this small room since more than 25 years, we don't have family members in Armenia, and getting older means getting lonely and not being able anymore to do simple daily work such as house work, let alone running to shops for necessary items. We are happy to receive these items to our home, but what is equally important is that these young volunteers from Armenian Red Cross come to visit us and talk with us" – so Mrs. Valentina Kasparova.

And one ARCS volunteer: "I am proud to be part of this amazing team of volunteers. Even if there is not much to do for our beneficiaries we just pay a visit and have a nice conversation, and seeing the smile on the face of these lovely old people is the biggest motivation to be volunteer".

IRIS Increasing Integration Through Education

Within the Education Component of the EU IRIS programme a series of workshops and seminars were held in the frame of Tolerance Education activity, organised by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). In particular since the beginning of the year, 56 teachers from five elementary schools have been trained to hold facultative Tolerance Education classes for the pupils after which thematic classes were given for them in their respective school. All in all more than 3'000 pupils from five schools have participated in the Tolerance Education classes. For this propose a special Teacher's Manual and Children's Story Book were printed which were initially developed and kindly provided by Save the Children Armenia, associate partner of the EU IRIS programme. After these classes the pupils through the fairy tales got more skills on the basics of tolerance, from cooperation to conflict resolution and negotiations, from children's rights to gender problems and from environmental protection to intercultural dialogue etc. This kind of activities will be held for the next two school years starting from September. In total 15 schools will benefit from this component by hosting Tolerance Education classes for their pupils. This kind of classes is planned to be implemented in primary schools with Syrian Armenian pupils.

In the end of June, also Psychological First Aid (PFA) trainings were held for teachers and staff of two schools. The aim of this trainings is to educate school teachers on how to act and behave with children who or who's families faced some difficult situations, and how to support that kind of children. For this propose a special PFA Handbook was provided to ARCS by Save the Children. This handbook includes chapters on communication issues and how to provide psychological support to children as well as recommendations to the teacher on concrete situations. Such trainings will be continued during coming school year.

IRIS Monitoring Visit from Austrian Red Cross

During last week of June, the Head of International Programmes and Projects' Department of the [Austrian Red Cross](#) (AutRC) headquarters in Vienna, Mr. Eduard Trampusch, came to Yerevan on a working visit, with the aim to closely monitor the progress of the EU IRIS programme, which in the long run should become an example of good practice in the region and potentially expand to other countries which face economic integration problems with refugees. During his three days he met with the heads of all consortium partners, namely with the Secretary General of Armenian Red Cross Society Dr. Anna Yeghiazaryan, Director of Armenian Caritas Mr. Gagik Tarasyan, President and Vice-president of the SME Cooperation Association Ms. Naira Manukyan and Mr. Hakob Avagyan, as well as the President of COORDINATION Centre for Syrian Armenian Issues' Dr. George Barseghian. During his visit he also had meetings with IRIS programme staff and with Ms. Narine Terzyan, the manager of newly created IRIS Business Incubator, the premises of which he visited on the spot. Moreover, he visited ongoing activities taking place in the PSS Centre and organised by the Youth and Education Department of ARCS. "Even though IRIS is just one of the programmes lead by AutRC, it is still one of the most important ones as this kind of programme aims to mitigate consequences of migration crisis, not only in Armenia but in whole region. We will continue watching after IRIS and its progress and development" – noted Mr. Trampusch.

IRIS Traineeship First Success Stories

Today we want to share with you our first success stories within the traineeship activity of the EU IRIS programme: Ms. Mari Yusuf, Ms. Arevik Bogossian (not real name) and Mr. Vazgen Matevosyan.

Ms. Mari Yusuf is one of the first beneficiaries of the traineeship activity of the EUR IRIS programme. She has three children, the oldest one will soon be 18 years old and start studies in Gevorgyan Seminary of Armenian Apostolic Church, while the smallest one is six years old. In her family – which was among the first refugees who decided to move to Armenia already in 2006 – no one works besides her. All her relatives went to the EU and USA, but she with her husband decided to escape to Armenia: first they went to Lebanon, and facing discrimination there they decided to come to Armenia. In Armenia they tried to open their own business, but did not manage to run it properly due to small market. Now they live only with the money she got during traineeships and some support they receive from the relatives in US. "This traineeship is more than simple support with money, it helps me to believe in myself, to gain new skills and to be integrated more in society" – states Mari. Thanks to IRIS she learnt sewing and after 3 months of traineeship period she got a permanent employment contract. "Thanks to IRIS my family has now stable income, it's always better to have a job than to wait for some support from organisations or relatives" – noted Mari. Her employer Ms. Arevik noted: "As my workers need to communicate with clients as well it is difficult to find right and single-hearted persons, who won't steal your clients and will not cheat neither you nor clients with regards to money, so I am happy and thankful to IRIS for finding such a good and intelligent person to work for me. My only concern was that Mari is not self-confident with regards to her communication skills in Armenian, but within this 3 months she got not only good sewing skills but also communication skills".

From our side we wish Mari and her employer Arevik good luck in their future cooperation!

Arevik Bogossian (name changed) is another success story of IRIS programme. She escaped to Yerevan not only because of war, but also because of gender and sexual violence from the side of her husband. It is more than half a year that she came to Armenia with her mother, however her children remain in Syria with their father and the Syrian law is in favour of the father's side. "IRIS helps me with my several problems:





first of all the professional psychologists help me to come back to reality, to be able to work and to forget the hell I going through; secondly it helps me and my mother with rental subsidies and finally it found a job for me. I am thankful to IRIS so much, it gave me hope to have my children with me" – noted Arevik. Before applying for traineeship Arevik had an agreement with her husband that she can take her children for several months to Armenia, if she pays for the travel. Thanks to the IRIS traineeship she got a full time paid traineeship work and receives a normal salary as other workers; the only thing was that IRIS pays 125 EUR per month and the rest of salary is being covered by the employer. Nevertheless, once she told her husband that she will buy the tickets by herself, he again denied sending the children. "I am happy as IRIS gave me hope to live and to fight for my children, now I don't need to think how to live but I can think how to get my children". Let's wish Arevik good luck in this not easy endeavour and hope that soon she will be successful!



IRIS is one of the programmes funded by the [EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad' Fund](#), which supports not only refugees but also local host population. Mr. Vazgen Matevosyan is local Armenian who also benefited from the IRIS traineeship activity. He – together with mother, sisters and his own family – were forced to move to Yerevan from Stepanavan town (northern Armenia) due to some family situation. They all live together in one house and only his mother has a job. He doesn't have education but was eager to get some skills and to work somewhere, just to be useful to the family and to be able to take care after his wife and child as well as his mother and sisters. Even though his father works as custom officer at the Armenian-Georgian border control checking point, he never supports them. Thanks to IRIS he got a traineeship possibility in one of lunch and catering chain of Armenia and after months he started to work as a chef. Within one month he will become a permanent employee. Even more, the management of the lunch-chain is so happy with him that they will support him to obtain an official state issued certificate from the state college stating about his skills as a chef, which in his future will help him to find job in other companies as well. "I can't believe to my luck, IRIS changed my life totally" – stated Vazgen – "Now I know that I can take care after my family".

This is about how life-changing can be IRIS. More about our Impact please read in the [EUTF Official Factsheet about IRIS](#).

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ARMENIAN CARITAS



Save the Children

Associate

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