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Increased Resilience of Syrian Armenians and Host Population

IRIS PROGRAMME



FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION
EU REGIONAL TRUST FUND 'MADAD'
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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 European Union, through the [EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis](#), the [EU 'MADAD' Fund](#), Austrian Development Cooperation and Austrian Red Cross.

YES, NOW IT'S OFFICIAL: EU Funded IRIS Business Incubator Is Operational!!!

The Official Inauguration of the European Union (EU) funded IRIS Business Incubator (BI) took place on 6th of November 2019. The launch event was opened by the [welcome words](#) of the newly appointed Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, H.E. Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin, the Deputy Head of Yerevan office of the Austrian Development Agency Ms. Nora Alanakyan and the Head of Operations and International Cooperation Division of the Austrian Red Cross Mr. Walter Hajek. The donors in their welcome words stressed the importance of the IRIS BI as an important actor in the process of economic integration of refugees and economic development of Armenia. The launch event was also welcomed by the presidents of the founders, H.E. Raphael Archbishop Minassian (President of Armenian Caritas) and Mr. Ruben Osipyan (President of SME Cooperation Association NGO). In her turn, the Director of the IRIS BI Ms. Narine Terzyan presented the activities and plans of the IRIS BI and shared information about the call for proposals. The event gathered more than 100 representatives of the state and international organisations, local NGOs as well as representatives from diplomatic sector including Head of IFRC Country Cluster for South Caucasus Ms. Olga Dzhumayeva and Head of ICRC Delegation in Armenia Ms. Claire Meytraud.

The previous six months were quite busy for the BI staff and for the EU IRIS Programme partners, namely [Armenian Caritas](#) and [SME Cooperation Association](#), which are in charge for the establishment and smooth operation of the Business Incubator: recruitment of remaining BI staff was completed, the name and brand including visual identities of the BI agreed and officially registered as "IRIS Business Incubator" (IRIS BI), office premises furnished and technically equipped, Standard Operation Procedures developed and agreed among all partners – and these are just on administrative level but the work does not end with it: on 23rd of October the 1st [Call for Proposals](#) was launched during a Press Conference, however programme implementers did not limit themselves spreading information only through the [Press Conference](#) and [Social media](#). Info Sessions were organised in [Yerevan city](#), [Shirak](#) and [Tavush](#) regions, even more specific info sessions were held also for the organisations who work with Syrian Armenians and other refugees to be able to reach out to the EU IRIS Programme's main target group. Due to the high interest the deadline for applications was extended by one week until 8th of December, until which 585 business ideas have been submitted to one of the three BI-programmes: SPARK, BUILD and START.

EU IRIS Traineeship Component Registered UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS

Within the framework of the Economic Integration component of the EU IRIS Programme the [Armenian Red Cross Society](#) (ARCS) continues implementing the traineeship activity. End of September/beginning of October 2nd round of interviews were held in the premises of ARCS with participation of representatives from ARCS, Austrian Red Cross and State Employment Agency. More than 120 applicants had applied for this 2nd round of traineeship opportunity, however only 60 were available for the interviews. After three days of interviews 30 candidates were selected for further participation to the programme, out of which six were local Armenians and the rest Syrian Armenians and other refugees from Yemen, Iran and Turkmenistan.

In total, 59 people (40 women and 19 men) – Syrian Armenians, other refugees and local Armenians – have so far participated in traineeships in different field of occupation such as accounting, sewing, table design, cooking, administrator, driver, dentist etc. Even more, 48 people (35 women and 13 men) out of these trainees after successful completion of the traineeship have already obtained a permanent job with their employer – such as e.g. the refugee from Iraq [Ms. Mari Yusuf](#).

Recently the [3rd Public Call for Applications](#) was announced by ARCS with the deadline of 23rd of February. Within the 3 months' traineeship activity trainees receive 125 EUR monthly remuneration – in order to get temporary employment with possibility to enhance their skills – and after successful completion of their assignments and on availability of vacant position they will have a permanent job contract.

Housing Issues of Syrian Armenians “in the Loupe” of EU IRIS

Since the launch of the EU IRIS Programme a total of 178 families were provided with rental subsidies support. In total 180'000 EUR were disbursed by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) within the EU IRIS Programme, each month reaching 100 most vulnerable Syrian Armenian families and supporting them with 100 EUR.



The housing issue of Syrian Armenians continues to be one of the most crucial and sensitive one for the representatives of the community. It is already 5-7 years that Syrian Armenians are in Armenia but until now the housing issues are not solved at all. In order to decrease the economic burden of the most vulnerable Syrian Armenian families living in Armenia, a Housing Selection Committee was formed which meets several times per year to select the most venerable Syrian Armenian families who will receive 100 EUR rental subsidies per month from the EU IRIS Programme. The Committee consists of organisations providing rental subsidies to Syrian Armenians as well as Syrian Armenian community organisations, in particular: UNHCR, ARCS, Armenian Caritas, Mission Armenia, Centre for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues, High Commissioner's Office on Diaspora Affairs, Aleppo NGO and Migration Service. Social workers of ARCS and Armenian Caritas collect applications for rental subsidies and then undertake home visits, after which the Selection Committee meets and discusses the applications against the criteria adopted by the UNHCR, which are: families with single parents, vulnerable older persons at risk, families with a member with disabilities, strong health problems, need of special legal and physical protection, member who experienced Sex and Gender Based Violence or any other kind of violence, families with a child at risk or women at risk etc.



Besides the monthly rental subsidy payments, the EU IRIS programme aims to find sustainable housing solutions and to develop a sustainable housing model for middle income Syrian Armenian families. For that specific reason, the Housing Consortium – with members as stated above and under the lead of ARCS – during the past developed, approved and published a call with the Terms of Reference for recruiting an expert for development of sustainable housing solution. This January, the Housing Consortium held interviews with applicants and selected [Advise Consulting](#) for the implementation of this task. According to the initial plan, in 6-8 month the Sustainable Housing Solution concept paper will be ready.

There are ALWAYS People Syrian Armenians can LEAN ON

Even though Syrian Armenians are in Armenia for more than quite a long time, they are still in need of case management activities because of the changing environment and changes of their own needs as well as within organisations providing services to the Syrian Armenians and other refugees. Bearing this in mind, under the lead of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), case managers of Armenian Caritas and ARCS continue implementing case management activities and referring beneficiaries to this or that organisation. Since the beginning of the EU IRIS Programme a total of 147 cases have been registered. Most of them are active and provided with advices and support of the case managers, only very few cases were closed due to the death of the beneficiaries or the fact of leaving the country.



It is worth noting that currently Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) with the support of UNHCR is implementing Economic Case management and with the support of Kuwait Red Crescent Society providing new [Humanitarian Assistance](#) to Syrian Armenians, both of which in its turn create synergies with the EU IRIS Programme providing complementary services for case management activities of ARCS.

One Window Services for Syrian Armenians

Info hub activities of the EU IRIS Programme implemented by the [Centre for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues](#) (CCSAI) remains to be one of the important activities within the programme. During the second half of 2019, CCSAI organised one [Coordination Meeting](#) with the managers and the heads of all organisations and projects providing any kind of services to Syrian Armenians. The aim of this coordination meeting is to ensure exchange of information among organisations active in the field on one side and to coordinate the services and to create synergies between different efforts of the organisations on the other. In October, CCSAI held also an information session for case managers, psychologists and referral officers with the aim to ensure that first contact points with the beneficiaries are up to date on available services and will provide proper support to the target group. Moreover, within the EU IRIS Programme CCSAI is in charge for creating and updating the complete information brochure on available services for Syrian Armenians and other refugees.



Due to the transformation of Ministry of Diaspora into the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, currently the [Informative Brochure](#) is published on the website of Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). The brochure is also printed in hard copies and provided to the organisations and case managers for distribution among targeted beneficiaries.

EU IRIS Will MAKE YOU SMILE

Considering the importance of the integration and existing integration problems of the Syrian Armenian community and other refugees, the EU IRIS Programme emphasises the Psycho-Social Support (PSS) and integration activities implemented by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). A number of cultural and social events and activities such as [visits to the museums](#), cooking classes, [social evenings or even meeting with the doctors](#) and discussion of common health issues were organised for Syrian Armenians during last six months.



Currently the number of PSS beneficiaries exceeds 340 individuals who participated in such [group based integration activities](#). In addition to this, more than 195 Syrian Armenians have visited the PSS Centre run by ARCS at least two times per week and received individual consultation and support from the psychologists, who identify existing needs of the clients and provide also case management



EU IRIS Is Also Next to Older People

Psycho-Social Support (PSS) of the EU IRIS Programme is not limited to the work of the PSS Centre run by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), it also includes the lonely older people living in dormitories. Within this activity ARCS volunteers distributed food and hygiene parcels to the most vulnerable older people living in dormitories of Hrazdan, Abovyan and Yerevan municipalities. Currently approximately 1'200 parcels have been distributed to more than 255 beneficiaries which include not only Syrian Armenians but also displaced people from Azerbaijan as well as local population in need. It is important to note that within this activity – which is implemented by the Youth and Volunteers department of ARCS – beneficiaries receive support not only in form of parcels, but also through daily household task assistance. Particularly for that reason, ARCS trains and involves a minimum of 20 volunteers who carry out their weekly visits to the older people and help them with household activities such a laundry, shopping or they just see them to talk and share their loneliness.

As mentioned by one of the ARCS volunteers: “We received more than we give, whenever needed Haykanush grandma gives me valuable advices, tells me some stories from her life.....” More about this story please read at the last section of the current bulletin.

NO Integration WITHOUT Education

Changes in society including integration of Syrian Armenians and refugees can only be realised with proper education from the very young ages. Therefore within the EU IRIS Programme three different kinds of classes – Tolerance Education (TE), Child Resilience Program (CRP) and Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) – are being organised by Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) in schools attended by Syrian Armenian children. While the target group of the TE and CRP classes are pupils of elementary and secondary schools, the target audience of the PFA classes are school teachers and staff of various state actors.

As mentioned in the [2nd edition of the bulletin](#), Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) organised TE classes already held in six schools for a total of 3'100 pupils. In October, trainings were conducted for 90 teachers in additionally six schools, where TE classes have started since November and will continue till February-March, with more than 3'000 pupils participating in the classes. The aim is to promote tolerance among the pupils of elementary school and to improve the integration of Syrian Armenians and other refugees. The classes consist of 12 topics such as communication, networking, conflicts and their solutions, negotiations, mediation, gender issues, youth rights, tolerance etc. The modules together with the teachers' handbook and pupils' story book were developed by Save the Children International – associate partner of the EU IRIS Programme – and kindly provided to ARCS for that activity.

Unlike TE classes which are being held by teachers for pupils of elementary school, the target of the CRP classes are pupils of both elementary and secondary schools. Classes are being held by volunteers who passed the Training of Trainers and consist of 20 modules such as how to overcome stress, making friends, my community, my future, what is war and violence, etc. CRP classes were already held in five schools for a total of 70 children during the first half of last year and new ones were conducted for the 13 volunteers in October, after which a set of CRP classes are already being held in additionally five schools and will finish in April-May 2020.

Finally, PFA classes are for teachers and workers of state institutions and stakeholders. See [2nd edition of the bulletin](#) for further information. During December, one PFA training was conducted for 20 teachers on one school (until now in total seven schools) and one training for 20 staffs of districts administration of Yerevan municipality.

Now Is YOUR Time to ACT!

Within the EU IRIS Programme, one of the important integration activities implemented by the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) are Youth Resilience Camps, which are organised for 20 youngsters (both local and Syrian Armenians) who are interested in becoming active in their neighbourhoods. The [1st kind of such camps](#) was held end of June 2019 in Tsaghkadzor city, during which 20 youngsters were invited to participate in classes of project development and management. After that they applied for the seed grants with the aim of making changes in the life of society and their community.

In December, four projects in various fields of society were approved, such as culture, environmental changes, Russian and English classes for Syrian Armenians and youth from dormitories. Additional 16 projects will be discussed and approved in March, projects will have to be completed within six months. Next Youth Resilience Camp is planned to be held early summer 2020.

Austrian Red Cross Presidents Visit

During 9-11th of October, presidents and representatives of regional branches of the Austrian Red Cross led by the Federal Commander in Charge and Member of AutRC Managing Board Mr. Gerry Foitik and Head of Operations and International Cooperation Division Mr. Walter Hajek, paid a study visit to Georgia and Armenia. During their stay in Armenia they visited Syrian Armenian beneficiaries from former EU funded “Promoting Integration of Syrian Armenians” project. Among the visits to the projects either funded or implemented by Austrian Red Cross they [paid a visit to IRIS Business Incubator](#) where they got introduced to the all EU IRIS Programme partners, their rolls within the programme as well as activities they are in charge of. Among the informal talks and presentation, the Director of the IRIS Business Incubator Ms. Narine Terzyan in detail presented the planned activities of the business incubator. The delegation of the Austrian Red Cross wished good luck to the EU IRIS Programme partners in their not easy tasks and promised to visit again and in the meantime to follow closely all activities of the EU IRIS programme.





Visiting Services: Success Stories

Visiting services of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) are part of the EU funded IRIS programme. Within these activities ARCS is providing older people not only with food and hygiene parcels but also paying regular visits and supporting them with daily household issues. Sano is one of the volunteers of Armenian Red Cross Society who is looking after several older people: "We never call people who we visit 'beneficiaries', because they are our grandparents. We listen to their stories, we learn from them and we are not shy to ask them any question about life. We help them but we get more than we give, we receive love, happiness and feeling of being useful", so Sano. Haykanush granny is one of the "grandparents" of Sano: "I used to live in a big family, in the beginning there were few volunteers, but then they become more and more, now I again have a big family as I was used to, they all are my grandchildren and they are giving me smile, love and happy aging", concluded Haykanush granny and gifted us with chocolates from her pocket. *For another story please read [here](#).*

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ARMENIAN CARITAS



'This newsletter was produced with the financial support of the **EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad' Fund**. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the IRIS Programme Team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union'

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