

26 June, 2017

## **Evaluation Report on Provision of Services of the Social Worker and Social Mentor for Asylum Seekers and Persons Holding Refugee or Alternative Status from 1 December 2016 until 31 May 2017**

### **General information on the subject of procurement**

The services of social worker and social mentor for asylum seekers and persons holding refugee or alternative status are provided under European Social Fund project “Diversity Promotion” No. 9.1.4.4./16/I/001 (hereinafter referred to as Project). Project is implemented by the Society Integration Foundation in cooperation with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and Provision State Agency. Funding is allocated from the European Social Fund and Latvian state budget.

**The aim of the project is to promote employment and social and economic inclusion of persons exposed to risks of social exclusion and discrimination while promoting the public awareness and general understanding on prevention of discrimination and inclusive society.** The project is implemented in accordance with the Cabinet Regulations No. 102 of 9 February 2016 “Rules for Implementation of the Measure 9.1.4.4 “Promotion of Diversity (Prevention of Discrimination)” of the Specific Support Objective 9.1.4 “To increase integration of inhabitants subject to discrimination risks in the society and labour market” of the Operational Programme “Growth and Employment”, and in accordance with the Cabinet Order No. 759 of 2 December 2015 “Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection” (hereinafter referred to as Action Plan).

### **Service provider**

Society “Shelter “Safe House”” was founded on 6 August 2007 with the aim of developing support services for victims of human trafficking, legal immigrants, including asylum seekers, refugees and persons who have been granted the alternative status, ensuring the individual’s right to receive adequate assistance and defence, changing public attitude towards victims of human trafficking, legal immigrants, including asylum seekers, refugees and persons who have been granted the alternative status; encouraging rehabilitation and reintegration into society of trafficked persons; providing support services to legal immigrants, including asylum seekers, refugees and persons who have been granted the alternative status; creating interactive forms of training; developing cooperation with state and local government institutions, public and Christian organizations in Latvia and throughout the world; to promote respect for human rights and to provide support to organizations that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## **Duration of service provision**

Society “Shelter “Safe House”” has been providing social worker and social mentor services under Procurement Agreement No. S-SIF-2016-17 “Provision of Social Worker and Social Mentor Services for Asylum Seekers and Persons Holding Refugee or Alternative Status” since 1 December 2016, thereby continuing the work with the target group clients commenced by the previous service provider, Society Latvian Red Cross.

**The total duration of service provision is from 1 December 2016 until 31 May 2018**

## **Target group**

During the reporting period, service was provided to both clients with the Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers “Mucenieki” and those outside it:

- ❖ asylum seekers requiring international protection and hosted by Latvia within the European Union (EU) relocation programme;
- ❖ persons arriving to Latvia independently;
- ❖ persons who have acquired either refugee or alternative status.

**On the average, 184 persons were serviced monthly.**

## **Thematic evaluation of the service**

The socio-economic inclusion plan for persons under international protection is most often implemented based on the Action Plan setting a specific goal: Establishment of a system suitable for Latvian conditions to host asylum seekers, as well as socio-economic inclusion of refugees and alternative status holders.

Social worker and social mentor services for **asylum seekers** are provided throughout the duration of the agreement or for 3 (three) months, or until the moment when the final decision on granting or refusing refugee or alternative status has entered into force and can no longer be contested. Social worker and social mentor services for **persons holding refugee or alternative status** are provided throughout the duration of the agreement or until the moment when the individual plan for socio-economic inclusion is fulfilled, or for a period not exceeding 12 months after the day when the aforementioned status has been acquired.

In order to provide the target group with quality services, Society “Shelter “Safe House”” has developed **3 Action Strategies**:

1. Provision of services and socio-economic support for the asylum seekers relocated to Latvia under the European Union relocation/resettlement programme;
2. Provision of services and socio-economic support for persons arriving to Latvia independently;
3. Provision of services and socio-economic support for asylum seekers who have received the decision on granting the refugee or alternative status.

The ultimate goal of these Strategies is to ensure availability of social worker and social mentor services as soon as possible after clients’ arrival in Latvia, and provide services to each and every person arriving in Latvia as an asylum seeker and who has been granted refugee or alternative status.

**During the six months from 01.12.2016 until 31.05.2017, services have been granted to in total:**

- **340** unique persons from 18 countries: 284 out of them had been granted refugee or alternative status and 56 had been granted asylum seeker status by the end of the reporting period
- **65** families with/without children and **61** individuals
- **196** men and **144** women
- **255** persons arriving under the relocation/resettlement programme and **85** arriving independently
- Among the service recipients, there were **185** persons of legal age and **155** minors

**Countries and number of clients receiving services in the 6 month period (see Figure 7):**

- **In December 2016**, the support was provided to in total **144** persons from Syria (97), Afghanistan (14), Tajikistan (9), Iraq (6), Armenia (4), Azerbaijan (4), Russia (3), Eritrea (3), Belarus (2), India (1), and Georgia (1). Services were provided to 31 families with minors – 131 persons in total, as well as to 13 individual clients.
- **In January 2017**, the support was provided to in total **184** persons from Syria (137), Afghanistan (14), Tajikistan (9), Iraq (5), Armenia (4), Azerbaijan (4), Russia (3), Belarus (2), Eritrea (2), Nepal (2), Georgia (1), India (1). Among the service recipients, there were 95 minors and 89 persons of legal age. There were 39 families, as well as 16 individual clients among them.
- **In February 2017**, social worker and social mentor support was provided to **215 persons from** Syria (154), Afghanistan (14), Tajikistan (13), Armenia (4), Azerbaijan (4), Lebanon (4), Bangladesh (3), India (3), Russia (3), Belarus (2), Georgia (2), Iraq (2), Eritrea (2), Pakistan (2), Sri Lanka (2), Cameroon (1). There were 46 families and 21 individual persons, including 107 persons of legal age and 108 minors, among the clients.
- **In March 2017**, social worker and social mentor support was provided to **190** persons from 15 countries: Syria (109), Eritrea (22), Tajikistan (15), Afghanistan (9), Azerbaijan (4), India (4), Lebanon (4), Russia (4), Bangladesh (3), Georgia (3), Sri Lanka (3), Iraq (2), Cuba (2), Pakistan (2), and Cameroon (1). Among the service recipients, there were 111 persons of legal age and 79 minors. In total, support was provided to 35 families, as well as 48 individual clients.
- **In April 2017**, support was provided to the total number of **205** persons, including 40 families (with or without children) and 43 individual clients. Among those, there were 114 persons of legal age and 91 minors arriving to Latvia from Syria (131), Eritrea (20),

Tajikistan (17), Afghanistan (6), Bangladesh (5), Azerbaijan (4), India (4), Lebanon (4), Russia (4), Belarus (3), Sri Lanka (2), Iraq (2), Cuba (2), and Cameroon (1).

- **In May 2017**, social worker and social mentor support was provided to **165 persons from Syria (100), Eritrea (20), Tajikistan (9), Afghanistan (6), Bangladesh (5), Azerbaijan (4), Lebanon (4), India (3), Russia (3), Armenia (2), Iraq (2), Cuba (2), Pakistan (2), Belarus (1), Cameroon (1), and Sri Lanka (1)**. Among the service recipients, there were 96 persons of legal age and 69 minors, including 23 families with or without children, as well as 39 individuals.

### **Implementation of the plan for socio-economic inclusion**

Upon commencement of implementation of the plan for socio-economic inclusion, the degree of complexity of the client's individual social case management is determined based on certain criteria; the degree is divided into 3 levels: high, medium or low degree of complexity. Assessment is carried out in the following 6 positions: family, education, work experience, language skills, health, and motivation for integration into the Latvian society. During provision of social worker and social mentor support, the complexity degree of the client's individual social case management may change, therefore, assessment is carried out on a monthly basis. In a period of six months, monthly **on average 84 clients or 45.65%** of the clients were identified as a high social case management degree of complexity, **87 clients or 47.28%** were identified as medium degree, while **13 clients or 7.07%** were identified as a low social case management complexity degree.

**Conclusion:** Upon arrival in Latvia, majority of the clients, immediately and concurrently, have to address many situations and issues placing them in the group of vulnerable clients and exposes them to the risk of social exclusion. Meanwhile, social workers and social mentors have to provide maximum support to a large number of clients – on average 171 clients or 92%, in order to address the identified client issues as efficiently as possible.

**Mainly, social workers and social mentors have provided the following assistance to the target group:**

- **support addressing daily life issues**, such as obtaining clothes, shoes and various house hold appliances – for example, buying children's toys;
- **ensuring cooperation** with the administration of ACAS "Mucenieki", medical staff working for ACAS "Mucenieki", psychologist with the OCMA project, as well as other experts;
- **accompanying to various institutions and organizations**, including educational institutions, OCMA, banks, medical establishments, "Rīgas satiksme", Employment State Agency, humanitarian aid points of the Latvian Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.;
- **organizing visits to receive consultation** with the lawyer of "Information Centre for Immigrants" (ICI) and various optometry centres;
- **assistance settling formalities**, such as preparing submissions and applications with the Office of Migration and Citizenship Affairs and banks, educational institutions, Riga social services, etc.;
- active search for **potential accommodation** together with the clients both online and in presence.

## **Social workers and social mentors**

Services were provided by professional social workers and social mentors with previous experience working with population groups exposed to the social exclusion risk: individual clients, groups, families with children, third-country nationals, asylum seekers, refugees, and persons with alternative status. The experience working with specific target groups has been gained both in Latvia and several other European countries, as well as countries outside Europe. In more than 8 years working in Latvia specifically with asylum seekers, refugees and persons holding alternative status, specialists in the Society have gained experience that is used now both working with clients and educating other employees of the Society and society in general.

During the reporting period, **2 social workers and 10 social mentors** with various prior experience and education have been engaged. Communication with the clients was provided via employees and interpreters/language experts listening to and implementing the clients' needs. The interpreter services were provided through Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund project "Information Centre for Immigrants" implemented by the Society.

Social workers and social mentors held regular meetings for professionals discussing various issues, thereby ensuring efficiency and quality of provision of services. During these meetings, employees were able to obtain the most up-to-date information on various issues, find a solution to a specific client situation, as well as exchange resources obtained. Specialists from other fields/cooperation partners were invited in these meeting sharing their vision of a more successful cooperation in implementation of clients socio-economic plan. In total, there were 3 such meetings held in 2016: on 16.12.; 19.12.; 27.12., while 19 meetings have been held during the first 5 months of 2017: on 02.01.; 09.01.; 19.01.; 23.01.; 30.01.; 06.02.; 03.03.; 10.03.; 15.03.; 21.03.; 15.03.; 21.03.; 03.04.; 10.04.; 18.04.; 02.05.; 19.05.; 29.05.; 31.05.

Social workers and social mentors are offered group or individual supervision, if required, on a regular basis; this supervision is a consultative support for issues related to daily work and professional activity. The main result of the supervision is increased professional efficiency and may cover solving different types of issues: awareness of professional boundaries, alternative action in specific work situations, establishing relationship with colleagues, subordinates, and clients, teamwork, work strategies, reduction of stress factor and burn-out syndrome, and many other issues arising in the daily work. Taking into consideration that work is carried out under high-stress conditions, when one has to be ready to make a decision, find alternative solutions to a situation, engage specialists from different situations or face other circumstances at any given time, supervision allows to maintain balance between work and personal life by strictly observing the professional boundaries. This is especially important to social mentors whose education and work experience with the specific target group varies to a great degree. During a period of six months, 8 group supervisions were held, on average 2 to 3 hours each, and 1 individual supervision.

To allow each and any of the specialists involved in procurement to raise their qualifications, different training with both local and foreign experts have been offered during these 6 months; in total 7 different seminars with a different duration have been attended, such as 2-day seminar "Intercultural communication and specialist with third country nationals", conference "Formal and informal education in integration of immigrants", "Changes to payments of SSIA benefits", 2-day training "EURITA Workshop On Resettlement and Integration", 3-day conference "Conference on good practices in integration of migrants in line with OSCE commitments and international standards", etc.

## **Funding allocated for provision of services**

The payment for provision of services of the social workers and social mentors for the period between 1 December 2016 and 31 May 2017 will amount to EUR 71,320.00 (exclusive of VAT). The monthly costs of social worker and social mentor services are determined by the agreement concluded with Society Integration Foundation on the provision of services of the social worker and social mentor.

## **Challenges and difficulties**

During these 6 months, social workers and social mentors have encountered a number of challenges and difficulties in implementation of the socio-economic inclusion plan; they have addresses these challenges and difficulties by themselves or with involvement of various cooperation partners. Mainly, specialists have had to serve as a mediator between clients and many other institutions and specialists alleviating the clients' negative feelings on getting accommodated in Latvia, reducing the psycho-emotional stress, motivating them to engage in carious activities and events, repeatedly explaining what are and will be the financial opportunities if the person chooses to stay in Latvia.

In general, the number of refugees in Latvia is low, so each clients situation gets an individual approach and the particular person is offered a specific solution.

Main challenges in work with the target group are listed below:

- ❖ Insufficient offer of clothes and shoes in the humanitarian aid points, especially in the winter period;
- ❖ Clients lack skills of using the products included in food aid packages, thereby increasing the expenses for buying food in the market and in shops;
- ❖ Parents are not able to assist children learning in school to any large degree, therefore, they do not follow the children's activities in school or knowledge acquired;
- ❖ A short period of time spent in Latvia by the target group clients before acquisition of the status, especially refugees in the programmes – resulting in little knowledge of life in Latvia;
- ❖ Once they have acquired the status, clients do not try to get accustomed to life in Latvia and make an independent decision to move to a different country;
- ❖ The free housing market does not provide persons holding refugee or alternative status with the opportunity to rent a living space corresponding with their income;
- ❖ Looking for a flat is time-consuming – there is no guarantee that owner of the chosen flat will enter into an agreement with a person under the international protection;
- ❖ Intolerance in the society against immigrants in general and in particular towards refugees from Eastern countries;
- ❖ The low level of Latvian language skills after being granted the status which reduced the possibilities of inclusion of the person granted international protection in the labour market in relation to the desired job;
- ❖ Despite the fact that many institutions have been involved into implementation of the socio-economic inclusion plan and each of them has specific tasks, a public opinion is fostered that the actual responsibility for inclusion of refugees in the society lies with the social worker and social mentor.

## **Cooperation with other institutions**

The provision of social worker and social mentor services has been provided in cooperation the institutions stated in the Action Plan – the Ministry of Interior, Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the subordinate ACAS “Mucenieki”, Provision State Agency, Ministry of Welfare, Society Integration Foundation, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Economics, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, as well as certain municipalities, including Ropaži Region Orphan's Court, State Employment Agency, Latvian Language Agency, etc. Separate meetings with the representatives from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees have also taken place. In order to provide the best possible assistance to asylum seekers, several non-governmental and religious organizations are engaged, such as societies “Red Cross” and “Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem” (I want to help refugees), Salvation Army, Betania Monastery, etc., and there has been a cooperation with several private entrepreneurs and socially active people.

## **Examples of implementation of the socio-economic inclusion plan**

- ❖ A family from Syria arrived to Latvia under the EU relocation programme; they stayed in ACAS “Mucenieki” in the capacity of asylum seekers for 2 months and an additional month after receiving the alternative status. Family raises three daughters. During their stay in ACAS “Mucenieki”, mother was attending the Latvian language courses extensively, while eldest daughter attended primary school and youngest daughter – the kindergarten. The father has 21-years of experience as hairdresser and cosmetologist, while the mother has 14 years of experience as hairdresser. After demonstration of his abilities, the man was given an opportunity to maintain his skills in a men’s hairdresser parlour in Riga. He did not attend Latvian language courses or lecture course on life in Latvia offered by the Society “Shelter “Safe House””, which made successful integration into Latvian society difficult for him, although, initially family had intended to stay in Latvia after being granted the status. Family received social worker and social mentor services under the socio-economic plan, including provision of clothes and footwear for all the members of the family, availability of health care services, support for children's education, etc. Social worker and social mentor, along with many other persons introduced the family to one of Latvian towns offering several accommodation options for the family after being granted status, as well as kindergarten and school the daughters. After being granted the status, the father considered the remuneration offered insufficient to provide for a family of 5, therefore, family made the decision to leave Latvia.
- ❖ Male for Eritrea. Granted refugee status in 2016. He has a college degree, qualification – engineer in measurement and creation of building foundations. He arrived to Latvia alone, under the EU relocation programme, and his wife currently resides in Ethiopia. The man has expressed a wish for family reunification. After being granted the status, clients stayed on for a while in ACAS “Mucenieki”, then decided to leave Latvia while intending to return. After almost 2 months, the client returned to Latvia. A living space was found with the help of social mentor, and client was registered there. He has also registered with the general practitioner. In cooperation with Riga Social Service, emergency food and hygiene product delivery was arranged. Since the man had health issues, he is still treated as out-patient in a health institution where he receives medicine once a week. He attended Latvian language

training and has acquired certificate attesting to language level A2. Employment was found with the help of Employment State Agency, and currently the client is employed.

- ❖ A family of 4 (father, mother, son, and daughter) from Lebanon Family has been granted refugee status. Family is currently staying in ACAS “Mucenieki”, and search for appropriate living space is on-going in cooperation with employees with ACAS “Mucenieki”, social worker and social mentor. Both parents are registered with the Employment State Agency, will start attending Latvian language classes, meanwhile searching for employment for both parents. Head of the social enterprise SIA Humuss has spoken with the family offering employment to one of them in the capacity of a cook. The main job would be to prepare oriental food that is sold in Kalnciems market in Riga on a regular basis. The father has a certificate in food safety and experience in food industry, so he considers the option to work as a cook. The mother is has education as accountant, she is a skilled manicurist and able to perform different cosmetology procedure. The mother speaks Arabic and French, as well as some English. The father speaks only Arabic. Children are currently attending one of the schools in Riga. The family is socially very active. Both parents and children attend various events promoting integration on a regular basis; these events are arranged by non-governmental organizations, such as Society “Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem” (I want to help refugees) – event “Live Library”, and by the Society “Shelter “Safe House”” Family enjoys staying in Latvia, and they see a future here for their family.