

Latvia

Support of Social Worker and Social Mentor for Asylum Seekers and Persons with Refugee or Subsidiary Protection Status

Level of implementation	National
Name(s) of implementing institutions	Society Integration Foundation (coordinator), Latvian Red Cross, Association "Shelter "Safe House"" (service providers)
Partners/Supporters	Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Provision State Agency
Main idea behind it, initial situation (why?)	This service was introduced along with Latvia's joining to the EU Relocation Programme and setting up an Action Plan for reception and socioeconomic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection in 2015.
Objective (what for?)	Social workers and social mentors are intended as main mediators and agents in promoting socioeconomic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection.
Description of practice (what?)	<p>This service is available while the person awaits for the decision regarding their asylum request, as well as 12 months after receiving the status of international protection and is provided at the region or city of residence (currently - in Riga and Jelgava). The number of social workers and social mentors employed depends on the number of beneficiaries of international protection and the complexity of their needs, thus there are no waiting lines and the service is available as needed. However, this service is not mandatory - if an asylum seeker or a person who has already received the status of international protection does not find it necessary, they are not obliged to set up an individual socio-economic inclusion plan.</p> <p>Social workers and social mentors assist in the initial adaptation period with daily tasks, job search, access to services and assistance. Each beneficiary of international protection meets with their social worker in the first days after arrival and an individual socioeconomic inclusion plan is set up. Social worker should meet with their clients on a regular basis to assess the progress of the plan. Social mentors, in turn, serve more as assistants and mediators in addressing everyday issues, ensuring cooperation with other institutions, accompanying beneficiaries of international protection to various institutions and organisations (and ensuring the presence of an interpreter if needed) to access services, consultations and assistance, assisting in settling formalities (ID cards, registration and the employment service etc), helping finding accommodation, etc.</p>

	By providing such an individual approach, social workers and social mentors can assist in preventing discriminatory encounters, educate representatives of the target group in recognizing discrimination and reporting it, as well as expedite access to necessary institutions in case of discrimination.
Managed/driven by	Government/civil society, namely: Society Integration Foundation (coordinator), Latvian Red Cross, Association "Shelter "Safe House"" (service providers as a result of procurement procedures)
Time-frame (start/end/ongoing)	Start: April 2016, Ongoing
Stand-alone initiative or incorporated into other initiatives?	Incorporated into other initiatives, namely: it is a part of a larger ESF project "Diversity Promotion" that is aimed at promoting employment of vulnerable societal groups. This project is implemented by Society Integration Foundation, a public foundation under the auspices of the Prime Minister, and the various services in the project are publicly procured. Hence, so far there have been two organisations that have provided the services of social workers and social mentors - Latvian Red Cross (from April 2016 until November 2016 and currently, since June 2018) and Association "Shelter 'Safe House'" (from December 2016 until April 2018). This particular project activity is supported by project partners - Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and Provision State Agency to ensure the necessary infrastructure for service provision such as the premises. It is as well an integral part of the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection
Main target group (nationals, non-nationals - types)	Asylum seekers/international protection status holders
Promotion	<p>oral, printed, online, mobile, languages: Latvian, English, some materials translated into Russian, Tigrinya and Arabic.</p> <p>There are several modes of promotion of this service.</p> <p>First, all newly arrived asylum seekers are informed about the opportunity to receive the assistance of social workers and social mentors upon arrival at the temporary asylum seekers centre in Mucenieki, Riga region. Similarly, information about this service is provided to beneficiaries of international protection if they seek assistance at the Information Centre for Immigrants.</p> <p>Second, online promotion of this service is done through websites and social profiles both of the coordinating institution - Society Integration Foundation, and of the service provider.</p> <p>Third, information about this service is provided to the wider public by creating infographics and overviews of the services provided, the stories of families and their life in Latvia, and as part of an information and awareness raising campaign</p>

	<p>of the project 'Diversity Promotion' by showcasing the outstanding issues and existing support and successes of representatives of the target group. The latter mode of promotion also serves the purpose of educating the general society about tolerance and anti-discrimination.</p> <p>In addition, indirect integration of this service with other activities of the project 'Diversity Promotion' allows addressing prospective employers and other service providers, hence facilitating the work of social workers and social mentors when performing the role of an intermediary.</p>
Information provided on legal, practical and procedural aspects of protection against racism/hatred and discrimination	<p>The services of a social worker and social mentor are provided on the basis of individual face-to-face consultations and individual socio-economic inclusion plans. While most asylum seekers also attend a social orientation course that introduces them with the basics of life in the society of Latvia, this course is quite basic and scarcely addresses non-discrimination measures and strategies for reacting in case of being discriminated against. Therefore, the individual socio-economic inclusion plan set up and implemented with the help of social workers and social mentors provides venues for ad hoc training and assistance in cases of discrimination, for example, when looking for housing, which is one of the primary tasks a mentor fulfills.</p> <p>It is with the help of mentors that beneficiaries of international protection navigate the country's legal system, become acquainted with the support they have a right to receive, better understand the regulation of public and private services, contents of rental agreements and so on. Moreover, as the social mentor often serves as a mediator between beneficiaries of international protection and members of the local society, they can prevent or monitor cases of discrimination, unfair treatment of even hate crime, and assist the target group in reacting to it accordingly.</p>
Methods of language/content teaching	The main method of communication is one-on-one and face-to-face mentorship.
Accessibility	<p>Costs: no cost for an asylum seeker or a beneficiary of international protection to access service.</p> <p>Obligatory: No</p> <p>Eligibility criteria: Status of an asylum seeker or status of international protection for the first 12 months after it was awarded.</p>
Budget, sources of financing	European Social Fund, Latvia's state budget.

Sources and references (hyperlink(s))	http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10060%3ASocialekonomiskais-atbalsts-patveruma-mekletajiem-un-personam-ar-beglavai-alternativo-statusu&catid=2%3Afonds&Itemid=256&lang=lv http://www.sif.gov.lv/images/atteli/infografika/ESF_integr%C4%81cija/ENG_vercija.pdf Consultation with the Project Manager, Ilze Dūmiņa (SIF).
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Impact assessment foreseen? How often? By whom? Is the target group involved into the evaluation/impact assessment? If yes: how Methods of impact assessment Indicator based? If yes: please name some indicators	Yes <p>The service provider is obliged to provide monthly reports to the project coordinator about the number of clients and the type and complexity of support provided, leading to a comprehensive overview of the overall course of the service since the first day of the implementation of this project direction.</p> <p>This monthly report is published on Society Integration Foundation website in a synthesised version, and this data has been used to prepare the so-called social portrait of the target group in 2016 and 2017. The service provider produces more detailed evaluation reports every six to eight months that are also available on Society Integration Foundation website. Such reports (find an example here) include both a thematic evaluation of the service, as well as numerical indicators, challenges, case studies, modes of cooperation with other institutions, etc.</p> <p>Society Integration Foundation has conducted several focus groups with the target group during the implementation of the service to assess its efficiency and effectiveness in reaching beneficiaries of international protection. In addition, the project coordinator has to conduct reporting and assessment as a part of general project monitoring, according to the requirements of ESF.</p>
Which actors of host communities are included? Degree of inclusion:	<p>The core element of this service of social workers and social mentors to beneficiaries of international protection is the mentorship and mediation between the target group and the host society. Thus, while the involvement of host communities is indirect (besides volunteers working for the NGOs providing the service), it is also inevitable if socio-economic inclusion plans are to be implemented properly. By assisting members of the target group in accessing goods and services, social mentors ensure and facilitate the communication and interaction between beneficiaries of international protection and the locals.</p> <p>as part of service provision.</p>
How can racism and xenophobia be countered through this activity?	<p>The assistance of social workers and social mentors ensures individualised social orientation practices, where alongside practical assistance in everyday situations an introduction and education on everyday norms takes place. The number of beneficiaries of international protection in Latvia is relatively low and has increased only due to participation in the EU relocation programme (for</p>

	<p>example, in 2017 only 298 statuses of international protection were granted), therefore many of the challenges faced by the target group are only recently fully realized and members of the local population are generally unaware of this societal group and their life in Latvia. Thus, this service is key for the social orientation of beneficiaries of international protection, serving as a source of information, source of practice and source of mediation. Of course, not all members of the target group must become a part of this programme, as the involvement is voluntary, it has been observed that those most vulnerable and most under the risk of being discriminated against do indeed request (and require) the assistance of social workers and social mentors.</p>
<p>How can the impact of this practice be measured/made measurable?</p>	<p>The direct impact of these activities can be measured through various dimensions. First, the experience of those beneficiaries of international protection who received the assistance of social workers and social mentors can be analysed through surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews. Aspects to be included in the analysis are the following - sense of ability to recognize discrimination and react accordingly; experience of discrimination, hate speech or hate crime; experience in interaction with public and private service providers. Second, data on reported cases of discrimination, hate speech and hate crime should be measured especially in regard to beneficiaries of international protection, besides the current overall assessment. Third, changes understanding and awareness of discrimination in the general society can highlight the impact of the whole project 'Diversity Promotion', thus monitoring the impact of all project activities that supplement each other directly and indirectly. Such monitoring is envisioned in the next planning period of societal integration policy.</p>
<p>Elements of sustainability</p>	<p>As this service is provided in the framework of an ongoing ESF project 'Diversity Promotion', it will continue at least until the end of 2021. For this time period, there are no challenges linked with funding. However, as the maximum length of a subcontracting agreement has been set at 18 months, it creates challenges for continuity in service provision, increasing experience and building trust. In order to increase its sustainability, clear guidelines for service implementation must be set by the coordinator. Currently, it has been a process of trial and error, as with every new service, and this momentum of improving should not be stopped with the finale of the project. Therefore, already now there should be a plan set in place for how to ensure the continuation of this service beyond 2021, as most of the involved parties see it as useful. One of the possible venues is to train and equip municipality social services and their social workers in providing such support if needed. That would ensure not only a more sustainable model of service provision, but also a more even geographical coverage for better accessibility.</p>
<p>Elements of transferability</p>	<p>The possible involvement of municipalities in service provision in the future also highlights a significant element of transferability. In essence, the assistance provided to beneficiaries of international protection is similar to services provided by municipality social workers, as it is based on individual needs assessments and individual progress plans. It is the specific knowledge about</p>

the target group that should be transferred to municipalities, as it is a relatively new experience for Latvia to serve as a host country for beneficiaries of international protection. Another element of this practice that can be transferred also to other countries is the individualized setting up of the socio-economic inclusion plan and then its implementation in cooperation with other institutions with tailored guidance by the social mentor. It is no surprise that beneficiaries of international protection require a more intensive assistance for their inclusion upon arriving in the society, if compared to other newcomers in the society. The individualized approach can help addressing their particular vulnerabilities and capabilities more successfully.