



Mapping of social orientation: the case of Latvia

Authors: Agnese Lāce, Rasmuss Filips Geks, PROVIDUS

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Executive Summary

Social orientation activities in Latvia are provided in the framework of societal integration policy according to *Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012-2018*. Main coordinating institution is the Ministry of Culture. Target groups for societal integration activities so far have been third country nationals and beneficiaries of international protection. However, social orientation activities of third country nationals have been sporadic, mostly provided as individual consultations in the framework of Information Centre for Immigrants. Social orientation activities for beneficiaries of international protection have become more comprehensive since 2015.

In general, state funded social orientation courses are provided for asylum seekers during their initial reception phase. Throughout the initial 3 month period, all asylum seekers are provided a course of 10 lectures that cover common topics related to the everyday life in Latvia, including information about Latvian history, social structure, most common language phrases, etc. Currently the course is being provided by an NGO "Shelter "Safe House"" and is funded from AMIF and state budget.

Additional social orientation for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection is provided during language courses and with the help of social mentorship. During the initial reception phase, all asylum seekers have access to 120 hours of Latvian language introduction course. The aim of this course is to introduce newcomers to common and basic phrases in Latvian, and as a result allow for better understanding of Latvian culture and society throughout the examination of various social interactions. Similarly, social mentorship is available for all beneficiaries of international protection for up to a year after being granted international protection status. Each beneficiary of international protection is assigned an individual mentor who works directly with them starting from their arrival at the temporary reception centre. Assistance provided by mentors focuses mostly on practical support - access to banking and allowance payments, visits to doctor, search for housing, which also provides valuable input to social orientation of beneficiaries of international protection. Latvian language course is provided by State Language Agency and is funded from AMIF, while services of social workers and social mentors are provided by an NGO "Shelter "Safe House"" and are funded from European Social Fund.

Additional language learning courses are available for beneficiaries of international protection after receiving protection status and while searching for employment, having access to up to 720 hours of language courses, provided by State Employment Agency and funded from the state budget. These courses are available in various language learning centres and can be redeemed using a voucher system.

Lastly, various local NGOs play an important role in the overall social orientation and integration process of newcomers. For example, "I want to help refugees" has created a Facebook community with the aim of providing practical assistance and support for beneficiaries of international protection. Its activities also include social integration events providing an opportunity for interaction between locals and newcomers.

I. Legal and institutional framework

1. Legal framework of social orientation

Guidelines on Integration Activities

In general, social orientation activities in Latvia are provided in the framework of societal integration policy according to *Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012-2018*.¹ These guidelines define the main principles of Latvia's integration policy, specify existing issues to be addressed, set measurable goals for integration policies and define specific tasks for different responsible institutions. In addition to this medium term planning document, shorter, two year implementation plans are elaborated. The 2017-2018 implementation plan² specifies a requirement for an introductory course for beneficiaries of international protection, as well as for informative and consultative activities on an individual basis, and for events that foster participation of newcomers in societal and civic activities. These activities aim to facilitate inclusion and understanding about socioeconomic and cultural space in Latvia for both target groups.

Both documents define Ministry of Culture as the institution responsible for coordinating the implementation of socioeconomic inclusion activities.

Action Plan for Beneficiaries of International Protection

General reception of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection relocated to Latvia³ is guided by the *Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection*.⁴ Adopted at the end of 2015, this plan appropriates funding and outlines the necessary activities and responsible institutions to foster robust socio-economic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection.⁵ As such, the plan specifies aims and defines the type of content that should be included in a socioeconomic introductory course.

The plan also specifies introductory Latvian language courses for all asylum seekers during the 3 months of the initial reception phase, so far developed and implemented by Latvian Language Agency, an assigned individual social worker and social mentor, a specific service coordinated by Society Integration Foundation, but outsourced to non-governmental service providers, and a learning course about employment possibilities in Latvia.⁶ Additional language learning courses are to be made available for beneficiaries of international protection after receiving protection status and while searching for employment.

The courses, mentorship services or language learning activities **are not mandatory** for asylum seekers, beneficiaries on international protection or other country nationals, and they **have no impact** on the decision regarding international protection status or residence permits.

¹ "Ministru kabineta 2011.gada 20.oktobra rīkojums Nr.542 "[Par Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādņiem 2012.-2018.gadam](#)" [Cabinet Regulation No 542 of October 20, 2011]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

² "Ministru kabineta 2014.gada 18.februāra rīkojums Nr. 268 "[Par Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādņu 2012.-2018. gadam īstenošanas plānu 2017.-2018. gadam](#)" [Cabinet Regulation No 268 of February 2, 2014]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

³ 2015/1601/EC, (22.09.2015).

⁴ "Ministru kabineta 2015. gada 2. decembra rīkojums Nr. 759 "[Rīcības plāns personu, kurām nepieciešama starptautiskā aizsardzība, pārvietošanai un uzņemšanai Latvijā](#)" [Cabinet Regulation No 759 of December 2, 2015]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

⁵ "[3. RĪCĪBAS VIRZIENS: Sociālekonomiskā iekļaušana](#)" [Action to be Implemented No 3: Socioeconomic Inclusion]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

⁶ "[3.1. Sociālekonomiskā iekļaušana patvēruma procedūras procesā](#)" [Action to be Implemented No 3.1: Socioeconomic Inclusion during Initial Reception Phase]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

2. Course/module providers

Ministry of Culture⁷ is responsible for coordinating the socioeconomic inclusion support services for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as the development of integration support system for third country nationals, beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers. This includes organizing public procurements and open project calls⁸ for local service providers, among those NGOs or public agencies, who are then responsible for the practical implementation of the activities.

Society Integration Foundation⁹ is a state institution responsible for coordination of implementation of the service of social mentors and social workers, available to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection for a maximum of 15 months (3 months in the reception phase, 12 months after receiving status of international protection). The implementation of these services is outsourced to local organisations in public procurements.¹⁰

“Shelter “Safe House”¹¹ is an NGO currently responsible for several activities as a service provider or a in the framework of a project. First, it is responsible for implementing socioeconomic orientation activities for beneficiaries of international protection in the framework of a project funded from the national AMIF budget. In this project, the organisation develops content and organises social orientation courses. Second, “Shelter “Safe House”” is a service provider for Society Integration Foundation, and, as such, maintains and coordinates a network of individual social workers and social mentors for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Social workers and social mentors assess each case individually, set up an integration plan and provide assistance to beneficiaries of international protection in daily activities. Additionally, “Shelter “Safe House”” is responsible for providing individual consultations to all immigrants, developing informative materials as well as maintaining and updating publicly available information about Latvia by implementing an AMIF project called “Information Centre for Immigrants/Newcomers”.¹²

Until the end of 2017, there were no specific qualifications for individuals implementing social orientation courses.¹³ Starting from 2018, the required **professional qualifications** for implementing the social orientation together with a Latvian language course include:

- for project manager: at least a Bachelor's degree in or as an educator of Baltic Philology or Latvian Language and Literature, who has studied methodology for teaching Latvian as a second language; at least 2 years of experience in working with nationals from other countries in educational institutions or personally as a legal or private individual during the last 5 years,
- for teachers: at least a Bachelor's degree in or as an educator of Baltic Philology or Latvian Language and Literature; at least 2 years of experience in working with nationals from other countries in educational institutions or personally as a legal or private individual during the last 5 years.¹⁴

⁷ “Kultūras ministrija” [Latvia / Ministry of Culture]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

⁸ “Atbalsta pasākumi starptautiskās aizsardzības personām (...)” [The Support Actions for Persons under International Protection] and “Nacionāla līmeņa koordinācijas sistēmas izveide (...)” [Development of National Level Coordination]. Tender Specifications, accessed January 14, 2018.

⁹ “Sabiedrības integrācijas fonds” [Latvia / Society Integration Foundation]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

¹⁰ “Sociālekonomiskais atbalsts patvēruma meklētājiem un personām ar bēgļa vai alternatīvo statusu” [Socioeconomic Support for Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

¹¹ “Patvērums „Drošā māja” [Shelter “Safe House”]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

¹² “Informācijas centrs imigrantiem/jauniebraucējiem” [Information Centre for Immigrants/Newcomers]. Accessed 14 January 2018.

¹³ “Atbalsta pasākumi starptautiskās aizsardzības personām (...)” [The Support Actions for Persons under International Protection]. Tender specifications, call announced on 24.03.2016. Accessed January 14, 2018.

¹⁴ “Atbalsta pasākumi starptautiskās aizsardzības personām (...)” [Support Actions for Persons Under International Protection]. Tender specifications, call announced on 24.10.2017. Accessed 14 January 2018.

Latvian Language Agency¹⁵ is a state institution that was responsible for providing Latvian language courses for asylum seekers during their initial reception phase until the end of 2017. Additionally, the institution is currently implementing a two year project providing Latvian language courses to third country nationals aimed at facilitating labour market integration until the end of 2018.¹⁶

The Education Development Centre¹⁷ is an NGO that works in the field of teachers' professional development. The institution is currently implementing a two-year project providing introductory Latvian language courses to third country nationals until the end of 2018.¹⁸

No state mandated regional or municipal support aside from State employment agency local institutions is available. Private sector providers exist only for language learning with institutions mandated **by State Employment Agency** to provide said courses using a voucher system.¹⁹

II. Audience

1. Coverage of social orientation courses

Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection

Social orientation courses. In the period from July 2016 until September 2017, **461** asylum seekers from 22 different countries participated in publicly funded social orientation courses. Courses were organised in 17 different groups and translated in up to 14 different languages.²⁰

One-to-one mentorship. Provided to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection:

- From April until end of November 2016 to **319** individuals;²¹
- From December 2016 until the end of September 2017 to **431** individuals.²²

Latvian language courses. In 2016 there were **218** asylum seekers²³ who participated in introductory language courses provided by the Latvian Language agency. Additionally, in the period from July 2016 until the end of April 2017 there

¹⁵ "[Latviešu valodas aģentūra](#)" [Latvian Language Agency]. Accessed 14 January, 2018.

¹⁶ "[Projekts „Valodas sākotnējā apguve patvēruma meklētājiem”](#)" [Project: Language Introduction for Asylum Seekers]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

¹⁷ "[Izglītības attīstības centrs](#)" [Education Development Centre]. Accessed 14 January, 2018.

¹⁸ "[Dzīvoju Latvijā - mācos latviešu valodu](#)" [Living in Latvia – Learning Latvian]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

¹⁹ "[Bēgļiem un personām ar alternatīvo statusu](#)" [For Refugees and Beneficiaries of Subsidiary Protection]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

²⁰ "[Noslēdzas atbalsta projekts starptautisko aizsardzības personu izglītošanai par Latviju](#)" [End of a Project Support Social Orientation for Beneficiaries of International Protection]. Last modified December 22, 2017.

²¹ "[Izvērtējuma ziņojums par sociālā darbinieka un sociālā mentora pakalpojumu sniegšanu patvēruma meklētājiem un personām ar bēgļa vai alternatīvo statusu laika posmā no 2016.gada 6.aprīļa līdz 30.novembrim](#)" [Report on Social Workers and Social Mentors for Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection from April 6 until November 30, 2016]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

²² "[Novembrī sociālā darbinieka un sociālā mentora atbalsts nodrošināts 110 personām](#)" [In November, Social Worker and Mentor Support was used by 110 Individuals]. Last modified December 21, 2017.

²³ Ērika Pikučāne, Latviešu valodas aģentūra [Latvian Language Agency], e-mail message to author, June 9, 2017.

were **23** beneficiaries of international protection²⁴ who participated in general language courses via **State Employment Agency**.

Third Country Nationals

Latvian Language Agency provided **Latvian language courses** to **316** third country nationals,²⁵ and Education Development Centre to **170** third country nationals²⁶ in 2017.

General Informative Support

From May 2016 until December 2017, the Information Centre for Immigrants responded to **3069** individual inquiries from **2514** individuals, which includes asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection, third country nationals and other newcomers. Most inquiries requested information about residence permits, employment and business, as well as questions about healthcare and education.²⁷

2. Access to social orientation courses/modules

Asylum seekers: Access to an introduction course of social orientation, 120 hours of basic language courses, individual social mentor, social worker and individual consultations from Information Centre for Immigrants. **No obligation** to attend or use any of the activities.

Beneficiaries of international protection: Access to language courses while unemployed, individual social mentor and social worker, ad hoc individual consultations from Information Centre for Immigrants. **No obligation** to attend or use either of the activities.

Persons under legal migration statuses: Access to ad hoc individual consultations from Information Centre for Immigrants, as well as to elements of social orientation that are a part of the available language courses. **No obligation** to use.

3. Initiatives targeted at specific non-national groups

In general, there are no separate activities or initiatives targeting specific vulnerable groups, but there are elements in the social orientation activities that can be identified as such:

Children: Interactive comic book “Hedgehog and Their Friends are Introduced to Latvia” that can be used when working with children was developed and translated in four languages.²⁸

Beneficiaries of international protection who are illiterate: Course of 10 interactive videos has been designed that cover various social orientation topics – education, celebrations, employment, medicine, housing, seasons, transport, money, security, documents.²⁹

²⁴ Antra Jansone, Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra [Latvia / State Employment Agency], e-mail message to author, May 26, 2017.

²⁵ Dace Dalbiņa, Latviešu valodas aģentūra [Latvian Language Agency], e-mail message to author, January 25, 2018.

²⁶ “Pārdomas projekta pirmo mācību gadu noslēdzot” [Conclusions from First Year of Project Implementation]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

²⁷ “Informācijas centrs imigrantiem palīdzējis vairāk nekā 2,5 tūkstošiem ārvalstnieku” [Information Centre for Immigrants Has Helped More Than 2.5 Thousand Foreigners]. Last modified December 28, 2017.

²⁸ “Ezis un viņa draugi iepazīst Latviju” [Hedgehog and Their Friends are Introduced to Latvia]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

²⁹ “Video”. Accessed January 25, 2018.

III. Courses/modules' characteristics

1. Social Orientation Courses for Asylum Seekers

The social orientation courses are provided to all asylum seekers who have applied for international protection. The courses take place while asylum seekers are still residing in temporary reception centre and are completed during the 3 month period in which their applications are reviewed.

- **Length:** The course is 10 sessions long, 2 academic hours each. During the project cycle, several rounds of courses are implemented.
- **Format:** Sessions are conducted during the day at the premises of course providers. Public transportation to travel to the course are covered. Courses are conducted in groups of 10 to 15 people,³⁰ schedule is planned for each group individually.
- **Language:** English and Russian used as intermediary languages, with the availability of an interpreter to other languages when necessary. Translation has been provided to 12 different languages since June 2016.
- **Content:** Topic areas are set in the Action Plan, while course content is developed by the service provider based around the topics. Starting May 2018, the contents of the course have to be licensed according to the appropriate educational regulations.
- **Payment:** Courses are funded by AMIF and state budget co-funding. Total funding spent in 2016 was EUR 69,545. State budget co-financing for the project was 15%.³¹ Courses are free for asylum seekers.
- **Exam:** No examinations. Evaluation of satisfaction twice during the course.
- **Means to certify non-nationals' participation in the courses:** From 2018, participants will receive a certificate for completing the course.

2. Other activities

Latvian language courses for asylum seekers include 120 hours of language learning at the temporary reception centre, mostly in native language with the help of interpreters. Course also includes some elements of social orientation, the content of which was designed by Latvian Language Agency. Courses are funded by AMIF with no co-funding. Total funding spent for 2016 and 2017 was EUR 251,230.³² Courses are free for asylum seekers.

Social mentorship for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection is provided during the 3 month period of initial reception, as well as for up a year after being granted international protection status. Each beneficiary of international protection is assigned an individual social worker and social mentor who works directly with them starting from their arrival at the temporary reception centre. Assistance provided by social workers and social mentors focuses mostly on practical support - access to banking and allowance payments, visits to doctor, search for housing, which also provides valuable input to social orientation of beneficiaries of international protection. Social mentorship activities are funded by European Social Fund with state budget co-financing.³³

³⁰ Starting May 2018. The number of individuals per group was not specified before.

³¹ Contract No PMIF/9/2016/1/03 EU. Project financed by AMIF, more information goo.gl/FRMecq.

³² "Projekts „Valodas sākotnējā apguve patvēruma meklētājiem”" [Project: Language Introduction for Asylum Seekers]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

³³ "Sociālekonomiskais atbalsts patvēruma meklētājiem un personām ar bēgļa vai alternatīvo statusu" [Socioeconomic Support For Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection]. Accessed on January 25, 2018.

Courses for third country nationals are currently mainly available as a part of separate project initiatives funded by AMIF with state budget co-funding:

- **Education Development Centre** provides Latvian language courses with an aim to facilitate integration in labour market and education system. Courses are available in separately organised groups for A and B language levels, and provide 120 hours of language training during a 4 month period. By the end of 2017, 13 different learning groups have been organised.³⁴
- **Latvian Language Agency** also provides 120 hours of Latvian language courses with an aim to facilitate labour market integration. Courses are organised in several Latvian towns in groups of 12-15 people, and are available for A and B language levels.³⁵
- **Innovation Support Centre** organizes 28 hours of integration courses for third country nationals covering various social orientation topics starting from autumn of 2017.³⁶

All of the projects mentioned last until December 2018.

IV. Content of courses

1. Aims of the courses

The overall aim of the **social orientation course** is to provide support activities to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection with a goal of ensuring their inclusion in society. This is achieved by providing them with study courses and adequate information regarding their rights and obligations. The activities provided in the course should also facilitate the development of skills and knowledge necessary to live in Latvia.³⁷

2. Themes covered

The list below includes the list of topics that are covered in each of the 10 lectures during the **social orientation course**:

1. Basic information about Latvia, form of government, history, culture, traditions;
2. Practical information about services in Latvia (banking, public transportation, telecommunications, availability of Internet, currency, etc.);
3. Information about inclusion in society, principles of non-discrimination. Basic written and unwritten guiding ethical principles. Areas where cultural differences might exist – including communication, religion, viewpoints on conflict resolution, decision making, time management, individual responsibility, etc.;
4. Information about housing market – possibilities for rents, rent contacts, payment options.

³⁴ ["Dzīvoju Latvijā - mācos latviešu valodu"](#) [Living in Latvia – Learning Latvian]. Accessed January 25, 2018.

³⁵ ["Projekts „Latviešu valodas apguve, lai sekmētu trešo valstu pilsoņu iekļaušanos darba tirgū”](#) [Latvian Language Learning to Facilitate Labour Market Inclusion for Third Country Nationals]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

³⁶ ["Trešo valstu pilsoņus aicina pieteikties bezmaksas integrācijas kursiem"](#) [Third Country Nationals are invited to Participate in Integration Courses]. Accessed January 14, 2018.

³⁷ "Ministru kabineta 2014.gada 18.februāra rīkojums Nr. 268 ["Par Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādņu 2012.-2018. gadam īstenošanas plānu 2017.-2018. gadam"](#) [Cabinet Regulation No 268 of 18.02.2014]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

5. Information about employment – the current economic environment in Latvia, job search, learning opportunities, welfare support. Rights and responsibilities during unemployment, access to job market, institutional framework for unemployment support;
6. Information about education – education system, institutional framework, studying opportunities, basic education, education for grown-ups;
7. Information and institutional framework for free time activities in different groups of interest;
8. Information about healthcare system – family doctors, specialists, healthcare for adults and children, paid services, access to medical services under universal coverage, health insurance; etc.
9. Information about social safety net and institutional framework for receiving social assistance (Lesson 9 and 10).³⁸

3. Teaching methods

General teaching methods for **social orientation course** include lectures, as well as practical activities and interactive discussions during the lessons. These include the use of audio-visual materials, including presentations and video clips. Large part of the learning process occurs through a question and answer session on the specific topics that are covered.³⁹

Additionally, the course has provided two types of study visits:

- cultural and educational study visits to Museum of History and Shipping, Latvian National History Museum, Riga Motor Museum, The Mentzendorff's House, Chocolate Museum and Riga Zoo, which were provided to approximately 1/3 of overall course participants;
- 14 professional study visits to Education Center Buts, and two companies “Senā klēts” and “Jaunais A salons”. These were provided to approximately 2/3 of overall course participants.⁴⁰

4. Participation of host society in the courses

No specific activities include the participation of the host society, some interaction occurs during the courses with the inclusion of volunteers and staff of the course provider.⁴¹

5. Other information related to content

Social mentorship for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection also aims of to facilitate full socio-economic inclusion and integration, as well as to reduce barriers to finding employment. The description of the activities for social workers and social mentors include participation in cultural events, facilitating understanding about life in Latvia, helping to maintain relationships with potential landlords and employers, helping with access to healthcare, education,

³⁸ “Ministru kabineta 2015. gada 2. decembra rīkojums Nr. 759 “[Rīcības plāns personu, kurām nepieciešama starptautiskā aizsardzība, pārvietošanai un uzņemšanai Latvijā](#)” [Cabinet Regulation No 759 of 02.12.2015]. Accessed January 15, 2018.

³⁹ Sandra Zalcmāne, phone conversation with author, January 19, 2018.

⁴⁰ “[Gada laikā zināšanas par Latviju ieguvušas 355 starptautiskās aizsardzības personas](#)” [More Than 355 Beneficiaries of International Protection Have Acquired Knowledge Throughout the Year]. Last modified on July7, 2017.

⁴¹ Sandra Zalcmāne, phone conversation with author, January 19, 2018.

employment and various other institutions, as well as participation in cultural events together with beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers.⁴²

General materials developed and made available online as a part of the social orientation course project include an informative booklet "Latvia – a country on the Baltic sea coast".⁴³ This material includes 22 different chapters on various social orientation topics, including legal rights and obligations, and has been translated in Arabic, French, Dari and English.⁴⁴ Additional information on employment is available in a brochure "First Steps to Employment", which was developed by State Employment Agency and covers a variety of information on employment in Latvia, including legal obligations, types of jobs, working environment, housing, education and social security.⁴⁵

Courses provided to third country nationals also include elements of social orientation. Their content is mostly focused on requirements for state language exams, and include topics such as presentation of personal information, education and work, daily activities, activities during free time and available services.⁴⁶ Additionally third country nationals also have an opportunity to receive practical assistance and advice from course lecturers, as well as build friendships and communities with other individuals who are attending the courses.⁴⁷

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⁴² "Sociālekonomiskais atbalsts patvēruma meklētājiem un personām ar bēgļa vai alternatīvo statusu" [Socioeconomic Support for Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection]. Accessed on January 25, 2018.

⁴³ "Latvia - A country on the Baltic sea coast". Accessed on January 25, 2018.

⁴⁴ "Noslēdzas atbalsta projekts starptautisko aizsardzības personu izglītošanai par Latviju" [End of a Project Support Social Orientation for Beneficiaries of International Protection]. Last modified December 22, 2017.

⁴⁵ "First Steps to Employment". Accessed on January 25, 2018.

⁴⁶ "Pārbaudes uzdevumu tematika pamata (A) līmenī" [Topics for Language Learning Exercises for Basic (A) Level Learning]. Accessed on January 31, 2018.

⁴⁷ Ērika Pikučāne, Latviešu valodas aģentūra [Latvian Language Agency], phone conversation with author, January 31, 2018.

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