



International
Social Service
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*General Secretariat: Geneva, Switzerland
Consultative status with the United Nations Economic
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9 March 2017

Refugee Union
3/F, 102 First Street,
Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Re: Provision of Humanitarian Assistance to Non-Refoulement Claimants
and ISSHK's Response to the Letter of 13 February 2017**

1. International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISSHK) is a non-profit, non-political and non-religious non-governmental organization (NGO) contracted by the Hong Kong Government to provide and deliver basic humanitarian service to eligible non-refoulement claimants.
2. Since the humanitarian assistance commenced in 2006, ISSHK has been operating the contracts according to the defined policies, types of assistance and amount of assistance per person including conditions for eligibility and monitoring required by the Hong Kong Government.
3. Particular to accommodation assistance, every service user may choose to determine the abode they would live in regardless of district with rent and utility rates **within the level of assistance that can be provided according to the government policy.**
4. ISSHK conducts a home visit to check on appropriateness, safety, availability of cooking area, electricity and water supply, hygiene facilities and safety and protection considerations of service users. ISSHK caseworkers will have to approve the proposed accommodation before service users sign the tenancy agreement between tenant and landlord. Landlords would have to produce or ISSHK checks the land registration of the property to be rented.
5. All rents and utility payments are directly paid to the landlords and utility companies by ISSHK.

6. Since February 2014, the amount of accommodation assistance is uplifted to HK\$1500 per adult per month and HK\$750 per child per month. Each person is also provided HK\$300 per month for utilities (water, gas, electricity). Moreover, the Hong Kong Government has assisted each service user with a rental deposit payment that is directly paid by ISSHK to the landlords and property agents.
7. ISSHK has strongly encouraged individuals to share flats as it provides a better space and facilities for service users. Even on flat sharing arrangements, landlords are paid by ISSHK for individual clients' rent, utilities and rental deposits.
8. There are clients who insist on living in flats or abodes with rent higher than the allowance of HK\$1500 and utilities greater than HK\$300 per person per month.

ISSHK thus has duly informed these service users that they will not receive extra assistance in the absence of justification and relevant supporting documents. It is in these situations that service users are assisted to confirm how they intend to pay the difference.

Some of the service users have been sponsored by church groups and NGOs, and all of which are interviewed directly by ISSHK to verify their commitments with written confirmation. For example, if they can guarantee to cover one year of extra rent and utilities, then ISSHK will clarify this with the landlords and property agents to assist service users to secure their identified abode.

The same arrangement is also applied to service users who declare to have individual sponsors, family and friends in Hong Kong or overseas who are willing to pay the difference. Details on the name, contact means and how much to be covered by these sponsors are all supplied by the service users which is again served as a supporting document for ISSHK to clarify with the landlords and property agents.

9. After rental deposit was introduced in 2014, it was observed that forfeitures were caused by the inability of service users to pay the extra rent and utilities above the approved assistance amount to the landlord. The use of a standard format to set out clear understanding with the service users and alert them of their responsibility became imperative. Thus the Guarantor form became a pre-requisite for rental approval both aimed at protecting service users from dubious landlords and ensuring that they are not evicted at whim.
10. In the current contracts effective 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019, ISSHK has included in the monthly contract renewal form paragraphs indicating the service user's full understanding, confirmation and acknowledgement of how much assistance he is eligible for and that any amount beyond this assistance would have to be borne by him.

11. Service users are asked to identify who provides them support and assistance and asked to declare the name and contact means of their sources of support. It is also stated that the service users will have sole and absolute obligation for payment of such rent and balance.
12. ISSHK has patiently explained to each service user the limits of their individual assistance. If they want to use their own resources, sponsors and connections to top up their rental assistance and utilities, ISSHK has duly reminded them that this is up to their choice and they are obliged to pay the rent and balance.

The idea of making service users identify their sources of support to top up the assistance is to ensure that they are well informed, fully cognizant of their decisions and able to take responsibility for their decisions to get abodes above their approved assistance levels. It was never intended for the service users to be homeless due to absence of guarantors. **As a matter of fact, most of the service users are able to reside in abode within their assistance levels and there is no need for them to have guarantors or sponsors for confirming their abode. Moreover, service users have been assured that they may approach ISSHK for assistance if they encounter difficulties in securing an accommodation.**

Thank you for your kind attention.



Adrielle M. Panares
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International Social Service Hong Kong Branch