Investing in the (Higher) Education and Training of Asylum Seekers and Persons with a Protection Status

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An ‘advisory office for German scientists’ has been founded in Zurich on an international, interdenominational and non-partisan basis.

Its purpose is to reasonably relocate scientists who have fled from Germany and have been ousted from their profession as well as to prepare them for the other countries.

(translated abridged quotation from the Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ, dated 16 May 1933)
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Confiscation of assets

- “The provisions on the confiscation of assets permit the authorities to confiscate any assets in excess of 1000 Swiss francs held by asylum seekers who enter Switzerland.” (State Secretariat for Migration SEM)

Restriction on employment

- “For the first three months after filing an application for asylum, asylum seekers may not engage in any gainful employment.” (Art. 43, Asylum Act)
- The Canton of Zurich (Office of Economy and Labour) is currently not issuing work permits to asylum seekers as priority is granted to Swiss residents.
Asylum and Social Welfare System in Switzerland

Core Tasks of Social Welfare

- Ensuring minimum subsistence level
- Financial and personal independence
- Social and vocational integration

Scope of Action on the part of Municipalities

- Housing situation (individual or collective housing, amount of approved rental costs); for asylum seekers, the level of minimum subsistence
- Decisions on measures regarding vocational integration
- Granting of integration allowances
Education Funding by means of Social Welfare

Competencies

The social security authority, which is a political authority, decides on the granting of social welfare in most municipalities – often taking a conservative approach.

In the City of Zurich

The City of Zurich has delegated the granting of municipal social assistance for asylum seekers and persons with a protection status to the AOZ.

≥ 25 y. → AOZ → Granting of Financial Support for Initial Education*

< 25 y. → Social Security Authority of the City of Zurich

*Initial Education = (Pre-)Vocational Training and Tertiary Education
Education Funding by means of Social Welfare in the City of Zurich

General Principles and Conditions according to the Guidelines of the Social Security Authority

- Financial support is granted for initial education, e.g. persons completing an additional education do not usually receive social assistance (see Guidelines, chapter 2.7)

- Students at universities of applied sciences as well as at universities are generally expected to contribute their own funds or to engage in gainful employment with a workload of at least 0.2 Full-Time-Equivalents (FTEs) while studying (see Guidelines, chapter 2.5)

Internal Guidelines of the AOZ

- Requirements for a successful application: clear professional focus, a real prospect of success (German language skills at least at C1 level of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR], field of study)
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Education Funding by means of Social Welfare

Cantonal Integration Programmes (CIP):

Integration Support within Established Framework

- Information & Counselling
  - Orientation and Needs Assessment
  - Counselling
  - Protection against Discrimination

- Education & Employment
  - Language & Education
  - Preschool Education
  - Employability

- Communication & Social Integration
  - Community Interpreting
  - Social Integration
Education Funding by means of Social Welfare

Grants and Scholarships

The following foreign nationals meet the personal requirements for cantonal grants in Zurich:

- Persons with at least five years of uninterrupted legal residence in Switzerland
- Refugees

(Excerpts from the leaflet issued by the Office of Youth and Career Services of the Canton of Zurich)
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Diagram showing the progression of language skills and education levels leading to job placement and the labour market.
Asylum Seekers and Persons with a Protection Status in the City of Zurich
Engaging in Tertiary Education

• Since 2013, the social welfare department of the City of Zurich has been co-financing the tertiary education of 16 persons with a protection status.

• The fields of study are varied:
  - Theology / Islamic Studies (4)
  - Economics / Business Administration / International Management (3)
  - Biology / Biostatistics (2)
  - Social Sciences (1)
  - Facility Management (1)
  - Human Medicine (1)
  - German Linguistics and Literature (1)
  - Psychology (1)
  - Mechanical Engineering (1)
  - Peace Studies (1)

(number of people in brackets)
Challenges while Pursuing a Tertiary Education

Admission to Tertiary Institutions

• Language skills at least at C1 level of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
• Entrance examinations
• Recognition of the education/degree obtained in the country of origin

Aggravating Circumstances for Asylum Seekers and Persons with a Protection Status

• Strong emphasis on language (e.g. examination system: knowledge questions, terminology, multiple choice)
• Required learning strategies, access to study groups
• Housing situation
Conclusion and Outlook

• In the 1950s: focus on highly qualified labour, e.g. rapid labour market integration of asylum seekers from Hungary

• Since the 1980s: focus on low-wage sectors such as catering trade and cleaning as well as support within labour market integration programmes, e.g. asylum seekers from Sri Lanka

• Current situation: focus on (pre-)vocational training and education for low-qualified labour
  – Confederation: focus on pre-vocational training (low-qualified labour)
  – Cantons: focus on rapid labour market integration (job placement)

• Hence, integration support is still not directed primarily towards highly qualified individuals

• Individual support within the scope of civic engagement and social responsibility is highly desirable (e.g. mentoring programmes, access to study groups)

• Secondary schools - as important facilitators of the access to tertiary education – yet to address the issue of education of asylum seekers and persons with a protection status

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Fachorganisation im Migrations- und Integrationsbereich
Thank You for Your Attention