

International Integration Conference of Estonia 2023
From Security to Solidarity: Challenges of Integration in the Times of Crisis
Integration of War Refugees: Scientific Approach vs Practice (Panel 2)

The societal integration of Ukrainian war refugees in Switzerland since March 2022: **Structural problems, missed opportunities and possible improvements**



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The societal integration of Ukrainian war refugees in Switzerland since March 2022

Two preliminary remarks referring to the conference and to the panel title



1. “From Security to Solidarity”: Ukraine war refugees are no relevant security issue in the Swiss context

Due to Switzerland's history, its geographical location and its population composition, "security" was and is only a very limited issue in the context of Ukrainian refugee immigration.

In the last two decades, the public focus in terms of security in the refugee sector has primarily been on potentially radicalised Muslims.

2. “Scientific Approach vs Practice”: No relevant antagonism in the Swiss refugee integration context

When it comes to disparate views and approaches in the context of refugee integration, in Switzerland it is usually not academia and practice that are at odds with each other.

The relevant antagonism is between the political or legal requirements on the one hand vs. academia and practice on the other.

Content



1. Some Numbers and Characteristics

The reception of the Ukrainian war refugees by the Swiss authorities

2. Structural Problems of the Reception

Which specific circumstances fundamentally hinder the professional and social integration of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland?

3. Civil Society Sidelined

How the accommodation and integration potential of civil society has been largely ignored by the authorities?

4. Possible Future Improvements

Which more promising precautions would be indicated?

5. Pointed Theses

Some propositions for the current international debate

Characteristics of the reception of Ukrainian war refugees by the Swiss authorities since March 2022: **Visa-free Entry/Stay for 3 months - Temporary Protection Status S - Official and Private Accommodation**



Ukrainian war refugees waiting for registration next to the Federal Asylum Centre in Zurich (Switzerland), 15 March, 2022

- Around 88'000 refugees from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection status S in Switzerland in the last 1 1/2 years
- In Autumn 2023 around 70'000 refugees from Ukraine are in Switzerland; 65% of these persons are female
- A large proportion of the adults among the refugees from Ukraine have a higher education and qualified work experience

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Structural Circumstances hindering the societal integration of Ukrainian war refugees:
Return-oriented Protection Status S - Ghettoising Accommodation - Restrained Qualification Recognition



Constructing prefab accommodation for 1'000 Ukrainian war refugees at the outskirts of the city of Bern (Switzerland), 6 July, 2022

- Limited official integration support due to the concept of "return orientation" associated with Status S
- The official accommodation of Ukrainian refugees is oriented towards low, often ghettoising standards of asylum accommodation
- Despite a formally fully open labour market and despite a currently exceptionally large shortage of skilled labour the employment rate of Ukrainian war refugees in autumn 2023 is still only 16-20%

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A remarkably helpful civil society was practically largely ignored by the authorities:

Hardly any public funding - Lack of professional support - No overarching communication platform



A Swiss family (left) has taken in three Ukrainians privately, 24 March, 2022

- In spring 2022, around 60'000 host families register online with "Hostfinder" and offer a total of around 120'000 beds
- Due to a lack of funding and professional staff, as well as insufficient information, most host families were left to their own devices
- The fact that today 20'000 Ukrainians are still living with host families is proof of the suitability and strength of this civil commitment

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How to perform better in a future refugee crisis concerned with societal integration:
Seriously Involving Civil Society - Integration without Ifs and Buts - International Expert Cooperation



A group of Lebanese experts discussing the reception of war refugees with Swiss colleagues, 15 June, 2022

- Dealing successfully with large fluctuations and extraordinary situations thanks to serious cooperation with civil society
- Recognising conceptually and legally that temporary protection and a well-supported, speedy integration go together
- Addressing temporary shortages of skilled workers for refugee reception and integration with international pool solutions

The reception and societal integration war refugees

Some propositions for the current international debate



1. In terms of accommodation and societal integration, **a welcoming civil society can organize refugee reception in emergency** faster and better than the authorities.
2. **The authorities need to support civil society actors in this task** individually with refugee reception experts and financially. (Analogy: State-organised home visits of professional midwives after births).
3. To have enough experts in emergency situations, **a transcontinental pool of suitable experts must be built up and trained.** Furthermore, the authorities must clarify the entry, stay, employment and management of these experts in advance. (Analogy: International aid in the event of earthquake disasters).
4. **The state can save a lot of money:** The above-mentioned measures cost a fraction of the financial outlay for otherwise necessary expenses in accommodation infrastructure, care in collective accommodation and related state measures.

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6. Comments and Questions

What might be useful for the Estonian or any other context?