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Areas of action “Orientation and needs assessment“ and “Counseling“

Analysis of cantonal reports for 2014

The area of action "Counselling" is a continuation of existing integration support measures and constitutes an extension of the "Integration Competence Centres" programme. During the reporting year, the Confederation and the cantons spent around CHF 10.6 million in this area. “Orientation and needs assessment” is part of the new specific integration support measures to be introduced or considerably expanded all over Switzerland during the period 2014-2017. In 2014, the Confederation and the cantons spent around CHF 8.5 million in this area.

The launch of cantonal integration programmes has led to significant development of information and counselling services for migrants. Among the various services to be introduced by 2018, all migrants will be welcomed and receive information about life in Switzerland. The Confederation and the cantons also wish to improve counselling services and provide assistance to established frameworks (e.g. vocational schools, public schools or labour market authorities) in their efforts to offer counselling and information services to migrants.

Milestones in the provision of initial information

Since initial information is a recent addition to the integration support package, many cantons devoted the first programme year to developing, introducing and expanding information materials and channels. They also helped cantonal and communal offices to welcome and inform migrants. In an effort to improve quality, discussion guidelines were drafted, continuing training courses were offered to employees of communes and information points were set up. The aim of continuing training courses is to ensure that migrants are properly welcomed and to improve intercultural competences.

Two implementation models used to determine integration support needs

Integration support needs are normally assessed during or after individual information meetings. Generally speaking, there are two main approaches used to gather information. Some cantons use individual surveys to gather as much information as possible. They then make recommendations to target groups or have migrants sign integration agreements. Other cantons leave ample room for personal initiative. In this latter case, the state informs migrants of existing services such as language courses or counselling. It is then up to the individual to decide whether to make use of these services or not. Some cantons also offer financial support for participation in these services.

Information and counselling mandate given to established frameworks

A core task of the state is to inform the entire population of available services or relevant circumstances. In order to be able to quickly orient new migrants, complex information needs to be readily accessible. During the reporting year, cantonal integration offices helped to develop or prepare multilingual information materials so that established frameworks would be in a better position to fulfil their information and counselling mandate.

Needs-oriented and low-threshold Information and counselling

As integration support activities, information and counselling do not end after the first contact or the first interview. The greatest challenge is to continue to provide personalised information and counselling to people. This implies the provision of information and counselling services following welcome events and meetings. In 2014, many Cantons set up decentralised regional and communal counselling services or expanded existing services. These contact points mainly provide information and advice to migrants and government authorities. In addition, the cantons are taking steps to facilitate access to services. Among other things, this includes cooperation with key persons and migrant associations.

Getting the local population involved

Information work also includes discussion of migration and integration issues with the local population. The various information options mainly include media work and public events. Each year, for example, the Canton of St.Gallen organises a competition to award "the Golden Gentian" prize to the most innovative integration projects.

Canton of Aargau: use of key persons

The use of key persons is an important aspect of integration support. Key persons are individuals with a migration background who are already well-integrated and who have networks of contacts. Key persons are able to provide low-threshold information to migrants as well as support and guidance in day-to-day matters and situations. The Canton of Aargau is helping the communes to establish a network of key persons and has drafted guidelines for this. These guidelines include a definition of key persons, a description of their skills and tasks and recommendations on how key persons may be managed and introduced in the commune. Continuing training courses, exchange of experiences and networking are handled at the Canton's behest by the Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau (AIA).

Additional information: Cantonal Office for Migration and Integration, Integration and Counselling Section, www.ag.ch/de/dvi/migration_integration/integration/angebote_fuer_gemeinden/angebote_fuer_gemeinden.jsp

Canton of Solothurn: Information events for newcomers

In 2014, the Canton of Solothurn invited all migrants who moved to the Canton of Solothurn during the year to come to a welcome gathering. Such gatherings were organised on six occasions in 2014 and provided information in fifteen different languages about local living conditions and integration services in the canton. A total of 452 newcomers attended these events.

Additional information: Canton of Solothurn Integration Office, www.integration.so.ch/willkommen/