

ANNEX

FEDERAL POLICE DIVISION

3003 Berne, April 1970

Note on living and working conditions for the information of
refugees interested in settling in Switzerland

Switzerland is often regarded as a country for holiday-makers, and it is easily forgotten that there is an everyday life which is different. Switzerland, one of the oldest democracies in the world, is situated in the heart of Europe, and bounded by France, Germany, Austria and Italy: it has no direct access to the sea. It has a population of well over 6 million, including more than 990'000 foreigners. Its climate may be called continental and is sometimes considered a little harsh, particularly by people who have lived for any length of time in more southern countries. There are four national languages, namely, German, French, Italian and Romansch. German is spoken in sixteen cantons, French in five, Italian in one, and Romansch in part of a canton. The great majority of the population are Protestant or Catholic. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution.

Its main economic activities are industry, which is highly developed, the hotel industry, which relies principally on tourists, and agriculture. There are wide opportunities for work in all these areas. This is apparent from the relatively large number of foreigners working in Switzerland.

Police regulations for foreigners

Refugees allowed into Switzerland are in general subject to the same police regulations as those applied to foreigners in general and, with a few exceptions, their status is the same as that of foreigners established in the country. Special authorization is required for any change of domicile or employment. Refugees must refrain from any political activity.

The labour market, wages, taxes and insurance contributions

Any refugee who is fit and willing to work can find employment. The regulations concerning the restriction and reduction in the number of foreign workers do not apply to them. Because of language difficulties and of the fact that vocational requirements differ to some extent from those in other countries, it is not always possible for a worker to find employment in his own branch. For the same reasons, it often happens that individuals with a university or commercial education are obliged, particularly at the outset, to be

satisfied with manual work. Good workers can improve their situation. It should be noted that it is neither advisable nor profitable to change jobs too often.

Wages vary according to the trade. Depending on aptitude and output, they range from about 4.- to 6.- francs per hour for labourers and unskilled workers and from about 6.- to 7.- francs or more for trained skilled workers. The number of hours worked per month is approximately from 180 to 220. Workers in agriculture, the hotel industry or in private homes receive free board and lodging and a monthly cash wage. Generally speaking, women earn less than men.

The wages mentioned above should be regarded as gross. Everyone must pay, out of his salary, income tax (about 10 per cent of income), contributions for old-age and survivors' pensions and disability insurance (3,1 per cent of income), in addition to accident, unemployment and sickness insurance contributions.

Housing

Accommodation is difficult to find, particularly in the towns. Refugees allowed into Switzerland can therefore not expect to live in any of the big towns such as Zurich, Basle, Geneva, Lausanne or Berne. There is also a shortage of cheap housing in the countryside. Rents vary between about 120 to 230 francs per month for one room or a one-roomed flat, 250 to 320 francs for a two-roomed flat, 320 to 400 francs for a three-roomed flat and 380 to 500 francs for a four-roomed flat. Rents are lower in the country than in the towns.

Cost of living

The fact that the cost of living depends on a large number of objective and subjective factors, makes it extremely difficult to give succinct indications valid in all circumstances and comparable with the cost of living abroad.

For example, in Berne, the following articles now cost (end of March, 1970):

	<u>Francs</u>
1 litre milk	0.80
1 litre pasteurized milk	1.--
1 kg. bread	0.70
1 kg. cheese	10.--
1 kg. beef	14.--
1 kg. sugar	0.80
1 kg. rice	1.50
1 man's suit	approximately between 180 - 220
1 pair of shoes	" " 40 - 60
1 woollen dress	" " 120 - 150
1 skirt	" " 40 - 60
1 pullover	" " 30 - 50

Social Insurance

Refugees living in Switzerland are entitled to the same ordinary old age and survivors' pensions as Swiss citizens. In certain circumstances, they are entitled to the same special old age pensions and to disability benefits. The old age and survivors' pensions and the pensions of the disability insurance are considered as basic benefits so-called, which, being the sole resources, are usually insufficient to cover the insurants' needs caused by the economical consequences of old age, death or disability. In order to guarantee a minimum income to those beneficiaries of old age or disability pensions whose own means are below living wage, allowances have been introduced. The purpose of these supplementary benefits is to bring the beneficiaries' insufficient resources to the income-limit fixed by the law. Refugees may apply for supplementary benefits after having sojourned in Switzerland for five years.

Refugees must take out unemployment and sickness insurance policies. Furthermore, in most cases, they must take out compulsory accident insurance policies.

Schools

Compulsory schooling covers from 7 to 9 years, depending on the canton. Primary and secondary education is free in the public schools. On the other hand, attendance at grammar-schools and universities is not free.

Aid

One of the charities affiliated to the Central Swiss Bureau of Aid to Refugees looks after the needs of refugees entering Switzerland, and, if need be, gives financial assistance, a large proportion of which is subventioned by the Confederation. In principle, such assistance is granted only if a refugee is unable to meet his own needs or cannot cover them adequately.

On arriving in Switzerland, refugees who are fit for work are provisionally housed, generally for a period of from 2 to 3 months, in boarding houses or homes until work can be found for them. During that period and until such time as they receive their first wages, they receive suitable assistance. When a married couple or family is supplied with an apartment, it is simultaneously provided with sufficient furniture to cover the basic needs.

The charities and authorities responsible for refugees try to help them to meet their own needs as soon as possible.

Invalids and disabled persons can rely on the treatment they require. The type and duration of the treatment provided are decided on on the basis of a medical report drawn up in Switzerland.

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Individuals unable to work because of their age are generally housed in privately-run institutions and given adequate pocket money. It often happens that the refugee has to share his room with one or two other persons, as single rooms are not always available. The refugee must observe the rule of the house.

Switzerland as a host country

Switzerland is regarded as the definitive host country for newly-admitted refugees. If they should at a later stage desire to emigrate or to return to the country in which they first obtained asylum, the Swiss Government puts no obstacles in their way. However, there is little likelihood of their being able to carry out plans of this type.

The person who travels to his or her native country loses the quality of refugee.

Travel documents

To enable them to travel abroad, registered refugees may, on request, obtain a travel document in accordance with the International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, or a passport for foreigners. In general, these documents are valid or can be extended for one or two years. The holder is permitted to return to Switzerland as long as the document in his possession remains valid.

Naturalization

Refugees may become naturalized after living in Switzerland for a sufficient period, if they can offer adequate guarantees relating to their assimilation, character and reputation. Before obtaining citizenship of their cantons and communes, they must obtain a Federal naturalization permit. This can be delivered only to foreigners who have been living in Switzerland for at least 12 years, three of them during the five years immediately preceding application. In calculating the 12 years of residence, the time spent by the applicant in Switzerland between the ages of 10 and 20, counts double. The same holds for the period spent in Switzerland while married to a Swiss national by birth. In the case of children, the period spent in Switzerland before they have reached the age of 10 may also count double in some cases.

Rights and duties of refugees

As Switzerland has ratified the International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, refugees staying in Switzerland, where they are covered by this Convention, have all the rights and duties set down therein. More particularly, they are expected to adjust themselves to the established order and, if they do not do so, appropriate steps may be taken.